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QUEENS.



Magicai G F I Raising Project

K!
宝島社

Mahou Shoujo Ikusei Keikaku

vol.10 - Queens

by Endou Asari

[Novel Updates](#)

Translator: [MGRP Translations](#)

Epub : [Tollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Illustrations





クラシアーネ

魔法の眼鏡でいろんな
場所が見えるよ



ダークキューティー

影絵を本物みたいに
動かすことができるよ



マナ

呪文と儀式で
いろんな魔法を使うよ



アーマー・アーリイ

攻撃を受ければ
受けるほど強くなるよ



フルーベル・キャンディ

気分を変える魔法の
キャンディーを作るよ



プリンセス・リュージ

氷の力を使って
敵と戦うよ



Shadow Tail

機械を改造して
パワーアップできるよ



Shappfrin II

マークや数字によって
能力が変わるよ



CQ Angel Hallel

頭の中に
直接話しかけるよ



Reete

相手の距離感を
おかしくしちゃうよ

Prologue

For the Magical Girls working underneath Puk Puck, every day was always a busy day, and it didn't matter which group you were in.

There were many groups within the Puk Faction.

One group practices constant battle in the dojo.

One group practices singing in a chorus in the studio.

One group carries a variety of items and objects around.

One group fixes the machinery and electronics. They're fixing the television right now.

All of them are working their best. All of them are Magical Girls, dressed in colorful and ornate costumes.

Seeing all of these Magical Girls, in all these cutesy and beautiful outfits, doing work that would be considered tiring, tasteless, and not gorgeous. At a glance, people may think it's all forced labor.

They couldn't be farther from the truth.

These Magical Girls aren't complaining at all. In fact, they seem to be *happy* when doing all of this work.

Not even when they're alone do they complain. They don't even have any complaints to their closest friends.

All of that is because of their wonderful leader, Puk Puck. Because of her, they can perform at their very best.

It wasn't labor to them, it was exciting and fun.

There were several boxes being transported. These were works of art, or rare Magical Items. They have more value than just objective value. They also had sentimental value.

These were irreplaceable items, that reminded Puk Puck of the memories of her older days.

In the front yard, boxes were being packed into large trucks, which were all lined up in a large convoy.

The trucks began to drive away, and some Magical Girls sighed at the tracks that they caused on the beautiful white sand.

Some Magical Girls were crying at the now empty parts of the rooms.

Even the Magical Girls driving the truck were chewing their lips while driving the trucks away.

All of them were sad for the same reason. This manor, it was filled with many memories for them.

Two Magical Girls were hugging each other. Once, they had fought each other in order to become the star of an Anime show, and after one won, the other didn't talk to her for a while. However, they've reconciled and have become closer than ever.

Some Magical Girls were making a barbecue in the large tree on the garden, *Yggdrassil*. They were eating happily and sharing their meals.

Puk Puck was praising everyone for their hard work.

All of these memories, this manor, all of them will be abandoned, thanks to an emergency that just occurred.

The nature of the emergency wasn't quite known to most of the Magical Girls. However, they kept working their part as well, even if they don't know exactly what's going on.

They were encouraged by their friends. They were encouraged by Puk Puck as well.

On their minds was the image of Puk Puck's smiling face. Now, Puk Puck is having a hard time smiling, and they wanted to see that smile again.

They were in hard times, but they all wanted to go back to a peaceful time.

"When all this is over, we'll be back to being happy again!"

"Yeah! So let's just get through all this like we always do, okay?"

Magical Girls were cheering each other and helping them look forward to a brighter future. Perhaps they can still witness that future, too.

A Magical Jewel.

Neither antique, nor art.

As its name suggests, it is a jewel filled with magical energy. Normally it's used by Mages for various rituals.

The jewel itself is large and dazzling. A tool to store large magical energy. Naturally, people will pay thousands to get a piece of this jewel.

Merchants, researchers, high-ranking individuals, all of them were willing to trade with the Puck Faction for money.

That money was then used to buy other resources as well, such as mercenaries, or more Magical Jewels.

Mercenary Magical Girls are only interested in the money offered. They usually had no attachment whatsoever to their contractor.

It's not ideal for someone as noble as Puk Puck. However, it didn't matter, as any mercenary Magical Girl who spent a little time with Puk Puck became infatuated with her.

There are plenty of Magical Girls living in Puk Puck's house now that were former mercenaries, now a happy member of her family.

Even if they were originally attracted by money, under the greatness of Puk Puck, they can change.

They become kinder, they become nicer, and they become friendlier than ever before.

If you only knew Puk Puck, then you would understand.

When Puk Puck is around, people change. Magical Girls change. The world will change.

All of these Magical Girls are now aiming for a better world.

Under the leadership of Puk Puck, they worked hard to achieve this utopia.

But there was one Magical Girl who wasn't working particularly hard at the moment, or working at all.

The Magical Girl who lost her sisters.

Uluru.

She was ordered to stay in her room, and to wait there until further notice.

Many of the other Magical Girls felt sadness and pity for her. Although they wanted to cheer her, they know that she's lost someone irreplaceable.

Her family.

Before, she always joined up with Puk Puck. Leader of her personal entourage. Other Magical Girls would often be jealous of Uluru, because Puk Puck seemed to love her and her sisters the most.

But now, everyone only felt sorry for Uluru.

W-City. The main staging point of Puk Puck's faction. This was Puck's home, and the eye of the storm.

The home of the Puk Faction has been besieged by many other factions.

Various forces watch over the Puk Faction, waiting for the perfect chance to strike. All of this information was used by the Puk Faction to determine the best way to defend.

Although this is usually daily life for Puk Puck, she can't afford to care about the gaze of other factions anymore.

Puk Puck's goal is too important to be cautious now. The time for grace and stealth is over. She had failed that part.

Puk Puck worked the hardest among her faction, figuring out the next plans, understanding the enemy, finding a way to achieve her goals.

Still, she showed her good side, always travelling around the manor with a smile on her face.

Puk Puck went inside a private room, where several Magical Girls related to the ritual was waiting.

A Magical Girl approached Puk Puck with a smile on her face.

“Lady Puck, you’re working so hard while we’re barely doing anythin. I kind of feel a bit bad.”

“Aw, don’t worry about it! Your time will come, don’t worry!” said Puk Puck.

Puk Puck wasn’t working hard to increase the morale of her faction, however. She was working hard so that she can ensure their safety in this dark time.

She’s being forced into a corner, and now she has to move out of the way, and that can cause significant losses.

The Magical Girl that smiled at her nodded, and returned to her seat.

She was wearing a black dress, with ribbons decorating her skirt, and a black nurse’s cap.

“Oh, Shadow Gale. I know you’re worried and all, but please just wait a liiiiittle bit longer, ‘kay?”

Shadow Gale glanced around with a smile.

“Okie dokie! We’ll wait as long as we need!”

“Thanks a bunch! Everyone, be a bit patient okay? Everything’s moving so fast, it’s a bit hectic at the moment, but don’t worry! Everything will be fine after!” said Puk Puck.

Puk Puck’s Magical Skill is adjustable.

She can adjust it for each individual person. This means that the strength of the friendship can always be adjusted.

It's not limited to an aura. It is in fact targetable. One person may sense a stronger pull than everyone else, or Puk Puck can just create a default level.

It's even possible to have maximum power. This creates the strongest bond of friendship, and anyone under the effect of this will undoubtedly feel a sense of longing and friendship to Puk Puck.

But Puk Puck didn't like to do that.

That's no different than brainwashing. Puk Puck hated brainwashing.

At maximum power, symptoms may show, such as obsession, infatuation, the inability to live without being near Puk Puck, and adoration on a level comparable to forced slavery.

Puk Puck doesn't like it when people are forced into liking her. She prefers to befriend them over time, after getting to know one another, to *truly* build a bond of friendship.

This is because Puk Puck's magic only takes effect upon actually seeing her. When they don't see Puk Puck, the target isn't under the effect of her magic.

Hence, the magic gradually cancels over time.

Suppose they were hit by a full powered version, then after a long absence from Puk Puck, they will realize that everything was a lie, and the trauma of brainwashing will affect them greatly.

Whereas a friendship formed naturally, with only the bare minimum use of her powers, is much stronger.

Because it's real.

It's not forced. It wasn't manufactured. It didn't magically appear.

The bond that Puk Puck builds with her large family is a bond built on mutual trust and friendship. These bonds would persist even if Puk Puck wasn't affecting them with her magic.

These are true friends, and the kind of friends that Puk Puck prefers, not brainwashed slaves.

“Let’s play together when we’re all done!” said Shadow Gale, with a childlike smile.

“Of course we will! Later though, okay? I’m very busy right now! Sorry Shadow Gale,” said Puk Puck.

Shadow Gale’s face was extremely happy at that sentence. She grinned happily and nodded her head many times. She lowered her head as Puk Puck stroked it.

Afterwards, Puk said her goodbyes. She regretted not being able to spend time with her new friends, but she was busy, and had many important things to take care of.

Each one of her friends are friends who would protect her. In turn, Puk Puck will protect them as well.

Puk Puck’s magic doesn’t force obligation, even if she uses full power.

Thus, should Puk Puck act in a way that doesn’t befit their friendship, it can deteriorate. Friendship is not forced, it is gained.

Friendship isn’t a one-sided affair, it is mutual.

If Puk wants loyal friends, she in turn needs to become loyal to them. If Puk wants friends who will protect her, then she must protect them as well.

A Magical Girl nail artist, *Illunail* .

A Magical Girl with sharp claws, *Beastman Brandia* .

A Magical Girl who forces behavioral patterns to her target unconsciously, *Anne Sardie* .

A Magical Girl that can make machines have hearts and feelings, *Burstis* .

All of them were Puk Puck’s precious friends.

“Good day, Lady Puck.”

“You’re looking cute today!”

"When I think of you, I feel a bit calmer, Lady Puck. I'm glad you're safe."

Puk Puck nodded and talked to each one of them, stroking their heads as she passed along.

Puk Puck proceeded to her room. She changed her dress. This time she's going for an elegant angelic toga-style fashioin.

She combed her hair. Styling it again after changing her clothes.

From the basement of the East Wing, she headed towards the tunnels to the West Wing. Time is of the essence, so shortcuts were essential.

She opened the sliding doors and passed through the rooms.

As she passed through each of them, she noticed one room in particular. She stopped there, and slowly opened the door.

A Magical Girl was sitting down on the floor, shoulders drooped. It seems the atmosphere suddenly became tense.

"Uluru, you doing okay?" asked Puk Puck.

"Lady Puck, where's Snow White?" asked Uluru.

Normally, Uluru would happily greet Puk Puck. Probably even feel better at just having her be nearby, but this time, her mind was clearly focused on someone else.

"Uluru, I know that Snow's friend caused Sachiko to... Well, I know, okay? But you can't keep blaming her and staying on this subject. It's unhealthy."

"But I can't just-"

"You leave it to me, okay? I'll have a chat with Snow White. Okay?"

Uluru sat down on her knees. Her lips trembled, and she covered her face with her hands. She let out a loud crying noise.

Uluru was crying.

She rarely cries, if only to keep her image of being a tough elder sister. Without her younger sisters, however, Uluru was alone.

Puk Puck approached Uluru, and stopped just in front of her. She took out a scrap of paper from her dress.

“I... I... I’m sorry, Lady Puck... I shouldn’t have cried, it’s just...”

“Hey, hey... It’s okay. You’re gonna be okay. I’ll take care of it, okay?” said Puk with a smile.

Uluru nodded.

Puk Puck hugged her daughter, and began to walk away from the room. However, a sound caused her to glance back.

Uluru was handing her a piece of paper.

“Hm? Uluru, what’s that?”

“This was the one thing Sachiko left behind.”

The paper had a name field, and two words, Yes and No . This all looks familiar.

It was Premium Sachiko’s Magical Skill. The contract required to activate it.

“You had this!? Uluru, this is big!”

“Lady Puck, I thought you might... want to use it.”

“Thank you, thank you sooo much, Uluru!”

Uluru looked like she was still planning on something, but Puk Puck’s heart is already elsewhere. She folded the contract and handed it over to one of her Magical Girls.

With this contract, she can guarantee the successfulness of the ritual.

Puk Puck immediately proceeded back to her original destination.

Sachiko... Even in death, your power will be used to save us all .

Everyone is playing their part of the plan. Without waiting for a reply from Uluru, Puk Puck already began walking away.

She didn’t look back. There wasn’t any time to look back.

This time, she can restore the Land of Magic.

She can be best friends with every Magical Girl.

Two birds with one stone.

Chapter 1: The Battle Begins

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

“The scouts have reported back.”

“And?”

“Puck Manor is packing. 16 heavy duty trucks were seen in the premises.”

“So, it’s as we thought, hm?”

The voice of someone in their late teens. The voice belonged to a senior Magical Girl. Her voice wasn’t that of a young girl, but rather that of nobility. With a rather unique way of speaking.

The rumors and reports that they heard were confirmed to be true.

The Puck Faction has been trading and selling off antique art and Magical Items to the highest bidders, gaining resources and money in the process.

Perhaps the Puck Faction intended to do it secretly, but it’s too late now.

Unfortunately for them, some of those merchants have ties to the Osk Faction, which they can easily trace back. Their transaction details were updated in real time.

Each transaction was transmitted one by one.

They even knew when the Puck Faction retrieves Magical Jewels. Down to the exact second.

Hammer thought to herself,

The Three Sages rarely interact with the world, so nobody personally knows them very well.

Whatever malice they possess, none of the world’s malice can touch them .

Grim Heart was like that, and Puk Puck is also similar.

“While I’d love to negotiate as much as possible, I fear our enemies won’t have time for that, hm. They’ll surely believe negotiations are a waste of time, and that leaves us with little options, hm.”

The Magical Girl lying on the sofa pulled up her chin.

A Hearts Shufflin came towards her, poured on a cup, and gave her a cup of bright orange juice.

The Magical Girl drank the cup of orange juice, tilting her neck as she drank it. Although that gesture doesn’t seem like a noble gesture, she made it work.

She has hair ornaments that looked like horns. She wore a luxurious dress that she shouldn’t be able to walk in, but she made it work.

She seems to have an air of elegance with her, no matter what she did.

No doubt about it, she’s as noble as you can get. Her speech patterns are also recognizable. A small tic, with her adding a ‘hm’ every now and then to her sentences.

Most people may find it hilarious to some extent, but even then, she made it work.

Hammer felt like she was a reliable person. She can already evaluate her based on her mannerisms.

This was Grim Heart’s suite in the hotel. Even in the suite, Grim Heart only sat on her throne. The sofa had never been touched.

This Magical Girl, *Lethe*, was different. She drank orange juice, she sat on the sofa, she engaged in things that commoners would do.

She had public opinion, and people knew her publicly, unlike the Three Sages.

Lethe wouldn’t hesitate to interact with the world. In fact, she’s a huge fan of battle. She likes people who fight proudly on the battlefield.

She was attracted to Magical Girls who displayed strength, and Magical Girls with an undefeated track record.

Lethe would even sometimes organize re-enactments of Mao's School fights, especially those of the Hell Survival Games. Especially the more historically famous games.

She always says,

"Even if you're a military Magical Girl, there are only a few strong ones who truly deserve respect, hm. Even I may bow to them if they are strong and powerful."

She's different from Grim Heart.

Grim Heart was born from an experiment to create the most powerful Magical Girl, in order to become the latest incarnation of one of the Three Sages.

Because of that, Grim Heart respected no one. Thus, Grim Heart fails as a leader.

Lethe, however, has humility. She respects strength, and understands that there are always stronger Magical Girls.

Lethe has earned Hammer's respect.

"Well then, I guess I'll be going to the ruins, hm?"

The Three Sages were created by The First Mage.

The First Mage also created a device, so to speak. A powerful device that was considered the Land of Magic's national treasure.

It's been sealed by the magic of ancient mages, and currently has yet to be activated. However, it was kept and managed with great care.

It is said to contain all the magical energy of the world, and is able to be released as necessary.

So they say.

No living mage has ever seen it work, or understood what it does. The only ones who have seen the device work are supposedly the Three

Sages themselves.

One theory suggests that when it was last activated, it absorbed so much magical energy that the balance of the world collapsed, rendering it sealed in some ruins.

The ruins themselves are hidden away in a separate space, that can only be opened using a gateway. The caretakers of this gateway are the Osk Faction.

The Three Sages' Factions have always consulted with one another on whether or not to use the device.

Naturally, overturning the discussion is hard work, but even the slightest disagreement prolongs the arguments, and buys time for the Osk Faction, as well as cause trouble for the Puck Faction.

"One question," said Hammer.

"Hm?"

"What will you do if you get into a fight?"

"A fight, hm? I'm someone who enjoys a good fight, but I know I'm not the best fighter out there. It depends on the opponent."

"If you get killed, it won't just be you that suffers. We'll all be in trouble."

A Heart Shufflin that was cleaning the glasses heard Hammer, and she nodded in affirmation.

Lethe laid down on the sofa.

Hammer then asked the question she wanted to ask a moment ago.

"What happens if you find yourself in a situation where you have to fight Puk Puck? Physically fight her, I mean."

Both Hammer and Lethe have seen videos of Puk Puck's dancing troupe released on the web. Puk Puck is light on her feet, extremely fast, and agile as well.

She looks as young as a toddler, and probably looks as weak as one too.

However, it's foolish to judge a Magical Girl's strength by their appearance alone. Puk Puck is a Sage, and she hasn't lived this long by being vulnerable.

Firstly, Puk Puck is a Magical Girl like any other, so thinking that she has weak strength due to her body size is foolish.

Secondly, if Puk Puck were easy to kill, she wouldn't have lived this long in her current form.

Lethe placed her fingers on her chin.

"If I meet Puk Puck, and get into a fight with her, I'll withdraw. Sounds good, hm?"

Once more Lethe proves herself a capable general. Rather than becoming too overconfident and believing '*I can definitely win*'. She knows her limits.

They need to be smart if they want to go up against a Sage.

Hammer respected Lethe even more. A clever general doesn't blindly charge into a fight. A clever general knows the enemies they can't beat head-on.

Grim Heart was created to counter Puk Puck, but because of that, she was too full of herself. Now she wasn't here.

"I don't plan on fighting her head on. In fact, I don't plan on encountering her at all. We'll defeat her without directly confronting her, hm?"

"So you've got it all planned out."

"I do, and Hammer"

"Yes?"

"When it comes to dealing with Puk Puck, I'll leave the direct confrontations to you."

"Huh?"

"If it ever comes to it. You'll make distractions and buy some time, and I'll be the one to escape to fight another day, hm?"

Hammer didn't understand what she was trying to say.

It took her a while to process those words.

Then, she shook her head.

"UM, NONONONO"

"I believe you mean yes, hm?"

"No! You can't expect me to last long in a direct confrontation! I'm better at organizing!"

"Of course you won't. That's why we won't have a direct confrontation. However, if we do, you have proven yourself to be lower on the priority scale."

"S-Surely I'm not..."

"You failed twice, hm?"

Hammer wanted to object. She wanted to prove that she hasn't failed yet, but what can she say? Most of her Shufflin 2 army has been annihilated, she didn't even retrieve Premium Sachiko for the Osk Faction.

What was she supposed to say?

"Oh sorry, Lethe. I was hit by the Shufflin Hunter from Hell".

That Magical Girl was a complete pain. Where did she even come from, focusing all her power on a suicidal attack on the Shufflins.

What was her goal? It seems she was only ever interested in hunting down Hammer's Shufflins, as if she wanted Hammer to fail.

There's no room for excuses in the Osk Faction. Lethe was completely convinced of Hammer's failure. Hammer herself wasn't convinced of her failure as a general, but rather the unfortunate circumstances of the Shufflin Hunter from Hell.

Hammer shouldn't forget, even though she's a much better leader than Grim Heart, the upper levels of the Osk Faction still have no room for failure.

Just when Hammer was secluding herself in her thoughts, a 5 of Clubs Shufflin burst into the room without knocking.

Hammer knew what that meant.

Hammer went over towards Lethe's ear and whispered something to her. In response, Lethe nodded.

The Shufflin was lucky that Lethe wasn't in a bad mood. Lethe normally doesn't tolerate any sort of rudeness.

However, now, she got off the sofa and folded it up. Hammer stood beside her, and the two of them waited for a guest.

Behind Lethe, Hammer tightened her posture to make her look better than her usually leaning-forward look.

Truth be told, she's actually nervous, and with good reason. When meeting this person, anyone would also be nervous.

"Excuse us," said a voice from outside, entering the room.

Lethe offered her hands to the visitors.

On both sides of the doorway, there were both Spades and Hearts Shufflin. What's left of them anyways.

"Lady Lethe. A pleasure to meet you."

The visitor used a title. People that use titles to Lethe means that Lethe doesn't personally know them at all. That means they weren't from the Osk Faction.

Are they acquainted with *Shayta Osk Val Mer* ?

There were two visitors in total. The first wore a tailored gray suit. Her hair was combed and straight. Her glasses reflected the chandelier above. Hammer couldn't exactly place an age.

She was somewhere in her early 20s or late 30s.

This one's probably human.

The second visitor came in hand in hand. Her dress confirmed that she was definitely a Magical Girl, with how outlandish it was.

Her eyes and mouth were wrapped with tassels. They were braided all around her body as well, in colorful patterns.

Because of this, it was hard for her to actually see anything.

She was being pulled as she walked, sometimes hitting the desk or the door, which she would grumble lightly at.

The human woman grabbed Lethe's hand and shook it.

"A pleasure to meet you. I am Ratsumukanahonomenokami"

Hammer hasn't been acquainted with this Ratsumukanahonomenokami, but Hammer recognized them as an incarnation of one of the Three Sages.

She straightened her posture. She might be considered a youngling by her.

Lethe was also aware of who she was, and while she shook her hand, she gave a warm smile to the Sage.

The human woman who shook her hand motioned to the Magical Girl behind her.

"Ratsumukanahonomenokami can't speak, so I will translate for her. My name is Yoshioka."

Because this woman couldn't speak, Hammer decided it would be rude to offer her drinks and food, as she probably couldn't eat, not that Magical Girls needed to.

Offering food to someone who can't use their mouth won't achieve the same effect of politeness.

Hammer is unsure of how to react in this situation, so she would just follow Lethe's lead. Lethe herself didn't show any special interactions, and kept her cool all the way, despite being in the presence of a Sage.

Lethe urged them to sit down. Yoshioka nodded as a reply.

“Well then, let’s begin, Lady Ratsumukanahonomenokami, hm?”

“Ratsumu will be fine. It’d be too complicated to always say her full name, due to its length.”

Why does she have such a ridiculously long name anyway?

Hammer was still confused if this Sage can speak, or listen, in the first place. For better or worse, Hammer decided not to speak, letting Lethe do all the work.

Yoshioka began speaking.

“Regarding the device. I’ve approved for resealing it. Really, we wouldn’t have expected that the Puck Faction would rush to activate it so suddenly. There were supposed to be restrictions, but now the bond that keeps people from unnecessary violence has been broken.”

She’s speaking in a lot of complex words so fluently. It’s as if she isn’t even waiting for a translation. It’s like she’s talking of her own will.

Maybe it’s just Hammer.

She turned her eyes to Yoshioka. Then turned her eyes to Ratsumu. Yoshioka and Ratsumu were tied by shackles bound to their wrists.

So Yoshioka led Ratsumu via chains, not by holding her hands.

Hammer turned around once more.

“So, I assume you’ve agreed to cast your vote to reseal the device, hm?”

“Yes. You should know we’re not like Puck’s or your faction. We’re relatively small in comparison to yours individually, and our funds aren’t that much to begin with. However, we’re still a faction, and that’s why I’m throwing my vote. With some conditions, of course.”

“Hm?”

“We gain 20% of your current project. Information, income, investments.”

"And you have the documents I assume, hm?"

"We do."

"Hammer, take care of it."

There are people willing to work with other Factions at the tip of a hat, or compromise and ally with a once enemy in order to stop a greater threat. Hammer would do this if it ensures victory. A good general shouldn't be blinded by pride.

By using this skill effectively, one can minimize conflict and achieve victory.

Case in point, by resealing the device, they could potentially prevent the Puck Faction from making any major moves until their next gathering, where they could then prepare and buy some time.

This was a supreme solution. A diplomatic one. One that could be done without spilling any blood.

A victory without bloodshed is the perfect form of victory.

However, Hammer shouldn't forget that the Puck Faction has been rather reckless lately. Their movements were quick, trying to prepare without being seen.

Even if they can delay their victory by resealing this device, that doesn't mean they can let their guard down around the Puck Faction.

They have to set up defenses. They have to prepare in case the Puck Faction does something like this again. Make the second time harder.

After they reseal the ruins, they're going to have to construct new defenses, such as Magical Barriers.

A Magical Fortress surrounding the ruins would provide good defense against an assault by the Puck Faction as well.

To do that, they need to have an agreement with the only other Faction that would help them.

Hammer prepared the contracts and documents on their end, and she handed it over to Lethe.

Lethe began writing on her end of the documents. She pushed it over to the interpreter, and the interpreter pushed her own documents to Lethe.

"You understand that the mortgage you're paying us isn't just financially, but also a military mortgage, right?" asked Yoshioka.

"I do," answered Lethe.

"With the Osk and Caspar Factions together, we can have a variety of benefits to each other. In addition to you gaining our assistance, we gain your financial and military strength as well. That means we fight with your soldiers. That means we push our projects with your money. I just want you to know what you're going into before you sign that contract."

"I understand the terms perfectly fine."

As long as they can defeat the Puck Faction, the conditions and the terms have already been decided.

Puk's crying face came to Hammer's mind. She quickly wiped off that mental image of her.

Lethe signed the documents, Hammer noticed her hands were slightly trembling. She was committing a large part of Osk's resources to Caspar.

Still, she showed her cool, and she handed the documents over to the interpreter, who smiled back at Lethe.

☆ Pfle

The Human Resources Division has always been a place with a lot of deskwork. Lots of experts on those can be found in this Division alone.

This is because the HR Division is the source of almost all new Magical Girls, and information on existing Magical Girls.

However, it's only an outsider's perspective that HR only gathers information. The people of HR are capable of using that information to the

best of their abilities.

Just because you have information doesn't mean you have the upper hand unless you know how to properly use that information for yourself.

After using information, you need to act accordingly based on the facts. Only then have you properly used that information to its full extent.

Right now, Pfle is investigating the actions of the Puck Faction. Afterwards, she plans to move any assets she plans to own against them.

Pfle left the HR Headquarters. There's work to be done far from here.

Pfle made her way to the Examination Division's Headquarters.

The lobby was still a little broken up and messy for some reason. Like someone was throwing a tantrum in here.

It didn't matter, because Pfle had already set up an appointment via telephone just a while ago, meaning she should head straight in.

She went underneath the roof of the lobby. It was *also* not in good shape. It felt like the roof could collapse under them at any minute.

Someone *really* doesn't like the lobby.

She stopped in front of the receptionist, who greeted her with a smile and escorted her further inside the building.

It seems that every single Division had the same idea of placing a friendly smiling receptionist to greet people with.

For the Examination Division, it was rather strange, given their outsider's view of them being more akin to a group of well-trained combat-based Magical Girls.

They arrived at a wooden door, and the receptionist knocked on it.

"Over here please," said the receptionist.

"Thank you," replied Pfle.

Pfle smiled and nodded to the receptionist as she entered the room. The receptionist nodded back and left her.

The room was actually a series of two rooms. The first one was a room for visitors, with two sofas placed there as a waiting space.

There was also a dark green carpet on the floor, which doesn't really match the color scheme of the room.

Several trophies were decorated on the shelves, as well as certificates. This feels like a Principal's Office.

It was quite simple in design, and usually the design of a room reflects the qualities of its owner.

The second room was the office of the person Pfle wanted to speak to.

When she entered it, sure enough, she displayed similar traits to the waiting room. Simple, to the point, effective.

She had a frame picture on her desk, perhaps of her family, facing her direction.

Other than that, her office was rather modest.

"Greetings. Long time no see," said Pfle.

"Yeah. It's been a while."

The Magical Girl, 7753 , had already introduced Pfle to Mana before, only shortly. Pfle confirmed that Mana was indeed in her list of contacts.

However, she couldn't remember when she was introduced. Any memory of Mana was hazy and unclear.

This is further evidence that someone has tampered with her memory. But who, why, and for what reason?

Pfle had travelled with her wheelchair, and she moved it towards the chair sitting across Mana's desk.

She stopped her wheelchair, turned it 90 degrees, grabbed the arms of the wheelchair, and moved to sit on the chair instead.

Mana looked surprised at Pfle's actions.

"I thought it might be rude not to use the chair you've provided," said Pfle.

"Do whatever you want," said Mana.

7753 is a very trusting Magical Girl. She's willing to believe in people easily, but Mana was different. She never hid that fact, either.

Pfle was experienced with manipulation, both from her and towards her. She knows more than anyone that how you present yourself is just as important as what you say to the person you're talking to.

There was a cup of tea prepared on the table.

Pfle grabbed it and drank it.

Everything from her facial expressions, gestures, the way she drinks, and movements are always done with the intent of delivering the appearance Pfle wants to be seen in.

The tea was delicious. Green tea, her favorite. It was brewed properly, at the right temperature, too.

She placed the tea down, and turned to Mana.

"It looks like major events are about to happen soon," said Pfle.

"Yeah"

Mana's short reply indicates that she doesn't trust Pfle. Mana thought Pfle was shady, and she was clearly on her guard.

What happened the last time Pfle met with Mana?

Pfle can't remember, but she can try to gauge it by how Mana reacts.

Of course, one thing's for certain. Mana believing that Pfle is deceptive and manipulative and not hiding her expressions about it means that Mana herself can be trusted.

"I should tell you that I came alone here, so you have nothing to worry about," said Pfle.

Mana's eyes were clouded with suspicion. Her eyebrows were raised in what looks to be a glare of some kind.

Her hands were down on her lap, and she slowly leaned forward.

Her attitude is like that of a cop who's seen some thugs and have dealt with them swiftly in the past.

Aside from her young appearance, she gives off that vibe.

"What's that supposed to mean?"



"It means exactly what it says. I came alone."

"Y'know, I don't like it when people try to play dumb with me."

Pfle began to roughen her speech. There's no need for formal politeness here. Mana's more comfortable with casual conversations.

Well, that's something Pfle can agree on.

"I'm not trying to play dumb with you. I'm not joking when I say I came alone, I really did come alone. I'm just stating a fact. That's also not why I'm here. Don't worry, I'm not here to be sarcastic."

Although, Pfle admits that somewhere inside, under better circumstances, she'd like to pull a few pranks on Mana.

She seems like a rather serious type. A prank or two might lighten her mood, and could be fun. Not now, though.

Mana was still eyeing Pfle suspiciously. Pfle relaxed herself and looked at Mana straight in the eyes.

"Mana, I know you're suspicious of me for something that I've done. I don't know what I did, and I haven't figured it out yet, but I accept that."

"Awfully convenient that you don't know what you've done."

"My memory's been wiped. I feel that magic may have been involved."

"Wow, resorting to excuses now. If your memory's been wiped, how do you know so much about how I feel of you, then?"

"I guessed."

"You guessed ?"

"I'm good at reading people, and that's not a mere boast. I can't remember when I've met you, or what we've talked about. All I know is the facts I can gather, and what your expressions are telling me."

"Doesn't stop you from lying about conveniently losing your memories. Withholding information can be a serious crime."

"It's not a lie. My memories of key events have been wiped, that's a fact. If you wish to interrogate me, or submit me to a spell, ritual, or truth

serum, then I'll happily oblige. But know this, my memories have been wiped, and I don't know why."

Mana furrowed her brows.

"So, why are you here?"

"Because I think I know who wiped my memory."

"And who's your main suspect."

"Myself."

"Huh?"

"I think I may have wiped my own memory. Nobody knows more about the events that I've done more than me, so I would be the only one capable of finding them. Also... I believe Shadow Gale is an accomplice, though I can't confirm that fact yet. I believe she knows where my memories are stored."

"I'm guessing you're going to make a point with all of this."

"Shadow Gale has been kidnapped. She seems to have been held hostage there. I need your help. I need her back."

Mana raised one of her eyebrows. Based on her expression, she still believes Pfle is trying to plot something behind her back...

...But there was also a hint of trust. Mana knew that something in Pfle's words were genuine.

"Kidnapped?" asked Mana.

"Yes, against her own will, I should add."

"Yes, that's generally what kidnapping implies. You also have to realize we can't just move people based on whims. Don't think that I'm not on to you or whatever it is you've done before."

"You want to try to prove she's being held hostage? You can't. I guarantee you the moment you send people to investigate, they'll all report that everything's fine, and there's no need to worry about anything."

“And why’s that?”

“Because I believe the kidnapping occurred using magic. There’s something preventing an active escape and I know Shadow Gale very well. The only explanation is magic. I’m dealing with a powerful opponent.”

“Who?”

“Av Lavchi Puk Valta. Current incarnation, *Puk Puck*. You may know her as one of the Three Sages.”

Mana’s face stiffened, and her skin grew pale. That name should be known to almost any Mage in the Land of Magic.

To a Mage, the First Mage is their eldest mentor, and as such, the Three Sages are the greatest creations.

Going against the Three Sages is a death wish to a Mage’s career, and to be honest, most Mages probably wouldn’t care enough to go after a Sage if all the Sage did was kidnap a Magical Girl.

“That’s pretty much it,” said Pfle.

“Come again?”

“What I said. Shadow Gale was kidnapped. She’s being held hostage against her will. I believe Puk Puck is the culprit. I need your help to investigate and rescue her.”

Mana began lightly sweating. Pfle could tell that what she will do will likely tarnish her reputation as a Mage, should she be wrong, or should she make a mistake.

“Oh, one more thing. Snow White. She works for the Examination Division, right? My sources confirm that she’s currently allied with the Puck Faction. It sounds like something the Examination Division should examine closer, no?”

Pfle knows that Mana doesn’t care about the dangers if her intuition is right.

Mana is someone who hates criminals and crimes. She wants to punish those who are guilty, and won't let anything stop her, Three Sages be damned.

If the Three Sages were committing crimes, Mana would fight them.

But there was also something else Pfle sensed. Within Mana, there were eyes of understanding. Somehow, Mana could feel how much Shadow Gale meant for Pfle.

Mana's sister was killed by a criminal a few years ago. This only served to burn the fuel for her to stop criminals wherever they are.

Mana's sister. The bond between them. That was the bond that Mana sensed between Pfle and Shadow Gale. It was probably the only thing that made Mana believe that Pfle really wanted Shadow Gale free, yet she still doesn't know if she fully trusts Pfle.

Mana is an investigator, first, however. So this was a choice of her morals. Her heart was in the right place.

One should not underestimate the Examination Division, nor its members, when they've got their mind set on a specific place.

Pfle was taken outside to the waiting room.

While sitting down, she heard the footsteps of Mana hurriedly packing her things and opening her drawers.

Mana is a member of the Examination Division. Being a Mage who performs field work that Magical Girls should do makes her extremely competent among Mages.

As a member of the Examination Division, Mana has always been against any kind of crime, and she's not afraid to face anyone who does them, Magical Girl, or Sage.

Ever since her sister, *Hana Gekokujo*, died, Mana's drive for justice has grown stronger, and it wasn't going to stop her from striking against the Three Sages if they really have kidnapped someone against their will.

If it's just Pfle's request, Mana probably wouldn't have assisted. Pfle had to appeal to her sense of justice.

Now, she has a powerful ally.

☆ Uluru

Something's changed with me .

Uluru can't put it to words, but she felt something different with herself. Uluru was ever someone who could properly express how she felt before anyways.

After Sachiko died, Uluru was quiet for the longest time. All she wanted was someone to listen to her, after all that's happened.

Just then, after pouring her heart out to Puk Puck, she walked away.

She kept walking away, despite everything that happened. Not only that, there wasn't much that she said after taking Sachiko's contract.

Now Uluru had nothing of Sachiko.

Uluru had nothing of Sorami either.

She had nothing of her sisters.

Uluru sat down in her room, she wrapped her arms around her knees, and dumped her face on them.

Sorami and Sachiko are gone. The only one she had that was still family is Puk Puck. Still, something's been bothering Uluru's mind.

Puk Puck has always been in the center of Uluru's world.

To Uluru, being able to help Puk Puck is the happiest thing in the world. That shouldn't have changed.

Uluru trembled.

Her heart was filled with anxiety.

Uluru tried to think of Puk Puck's smiling face. Usually, the thought of Puk Puck calmed her down and made her happy.

But she can't seem to picture her at all.

She wanted to think about Puk Puck, but her thoughts were clouded. She can't seem to think of her, and when she did, it didn't calm her down.

The only people that she can think about is Sorami and Sachiko.

Ulluru has known Puk Puck the longest. She tried to think about how to help Puk Puck, but she can't think of how.

Uluru hugged her knees even tighter.

No, that's wrong.

It's not that Uluru couldn't think of Puk Puck, or couldn't think of helping Puk Puck. That's not the truth.

It's that Puk Puck herself has changed in Uluru's mind.

She seems so indifferent.

Where was her loving and caring mother?

She wanted to go home to her mother and be comforted by her, and pour out everything she could towards her.

Instead she was told to stay in her room, keeping her emotions locked in, and Puk Puck rarely visited her.

It's like Puk Puck didn't care about Uluru at all.

Even when she visited, did she even care about Sachiko and Sorami?

Uluru wanted to give her Sachiko's contract because Uluru thought that it would serve as a good memento, as well as a good way of starting a conversation about her.

But she took the contract, was happy, and left.

It's as if Sachiko herself wasn't important, only her powers and her contract.

Those are the thoughts that made Uluru even more anxious than before. It keeps floating into her head, and it's making her uneasy.

Even though she pushed those thoughts away, it will always come back again and again.

She thought about Sachiko.

"I don't want to cause trouble using my Magic"

What was Puk Puck going to use Sachiko's contract for? The ritual? That's what Sachiko's supposed to be prepared for.

What is the ritual? She doesn't really know the full details. She never bothered to ask because she trusted Puk Puck.

She never logically thought of Puk Puck actually wanting any malice. She loved Puk Puck like her own mother. Why would a mother hurt her children?

That's why she was so mad at Sachiko for leaving. After everything Puk Puck did for them all these years, to just leave like that would be like disrespecting the person who cared for you all these years.

But Uluru never considered the possibility that Puk Puck was indifferent to it all.

Uluru's mental well-being is based upon a few mental pillars.

Some of those pillars were Sachiko and Sorami's love and support. With those two gone, those pillars have shattered.

Another was the love and care of her mother, Puk Puck.

Puk Puck isn't gone, but for some reason, she doesn't feel the same as before. That pillar is slowly disappearing too.

There isn't much left for Uluru.

She can't lie to herself. In the first place, Uluru was never a good liar. The only reason people would believe her was her power.

She can't lie to her own heart.

All she could do was hold back tears.

She fell on the ground, still hugging her knees.

She began thinking other thoughts. Sachiko escaped from here, can Uluru do the same thing? She managed somehow, right?

Would Sorami be able to do the same thing, too?

Uluru could go through the guards and tell them lies.

She felt the tatami mat on her cheeks. It reminded her of Sachiko.

When they were younger, Sachiko had a habit of falling off and sleeping on the floor. Then, the sisters would wake up one day and find her snoring and drooling all over the tatami mat.

This would usually make Sorami laugh harder than before, which in turn would wake up Sachiko.

The laughter would cause the grumpy Uluru to groan.

Sorami would then pinch Sachiko's cheeks, "*Ahaha, you're so cute, sis!*"

Sachiko would be embarrassed, "*S-Stop laughing at me!*"

Uluru touched the tatami mat with her hand. She wanted those moments back.

After a few minutes, Uluru stood up again. Her feet were numb. When she got up, bloodflow rushed to her feet, giving it a weakened tingling feeling.

How long had she been laying down?

She decided to walk off the numbness, moving to each corner, circling her room, pacing to get her mind off things.

She counted each step in her head. She needed to distract herself. She wanted to move on, but her sisters' faces kept popping into her head.

Maybe seeing people would do the trick?

For the first time in a while, Uluru opened her door, and walked along the corridors. Her pace was slow, and other Magical Girls that passed by

her were all busy with work. They were all in the process of helping Puk Puck.

Nobody glanced at Uluru at all. It was a sea of Magical Girls, and Uluru was just calmly walking along.

Uluru's loyalty to Puk Puck was out of love. Devotion from being cared for. Puk Puck was a loving mother to her and her sisters.

Puk Puck was kind to her friends. At first glance, you might call them servants of her house, but Puck Manor is filled with people who served Puk Puck because of personal loyalty. Because Puk Puck cared for them in some way.

That's how Uluru always felt, and she always assumed everyone else felt the same way.

But, recently... Something in the air is different.

There were some recent additions to the Manor. Normally, Uluru didn't question these things. Every addition was such a blur that Uluru couldn't really process them all. Mostly because she was still in grief.

But there were people that seemed to be loyal to Puk Puck not out of genuine devotion.

As if they were loyal due to some strange form of adoration.

Something is wrong in the manor. Something feels horribly wrong.

Uluru nearly collapsed, so she walked by grabbing the walls. Then she began wrapping her arms around herself, walking while leaning on the walls, away from any Magical Girls that passed by.

Uluru couldn't think of Sorami and Sachiko anymore. She wanted to force herself to move on. Uluru couldn't think of Puk Puck either. She only felt dissonance if she thought of her.

With no one else to think about, her mind went to one person.

Snow White.

It was Snow White's friend that got Sachiko killed. That was a fact. Snow White even admitted that fact.

I thought she was our ally.

Why did you stop? You said she was a friend of yours.

You said we could trust her... How can I trust you?

Uluru got so angry at Snow White, she insisted that Snow White head back to Puck Manor.

Uluru didn't know if it was her powers, or if Snow White herself felt guilty, but against all odds, Snow White agreed to go back to Puck Manor.

After that, Uluru was told to go stay in her room. She had heard that Snow White was then locked in the drawing room.

Was it her own choosing? Snow White could easily escape if she wanted.

Was it guilt? Is guilt keeping her there?

Uluru didn't understand what's going on.

She needed answers. Who was that friend of Snow White's? Why did she kill Sachiko...

...Sachiko...

Sachiko's face, her human face, was just like her Magical Girl. However, she had short brown hair, just like Uluru's hair color.

Soft and calm. Finally at peace, but... But not in the way that Uluru wanted...

Uluru began to cry, but she didn't want to. Not out here. Not in the hallway. She had to focus. She wanted answers, right?

Uluru went towards the drawing room. She took out her popgun rifle. She opened the lock of the drawing room.

"Snow White."

There, sitting in a chair, was a white Magical Girl, staring down at the floor. Upon hearing her name, she slowly tilted her head upwards.

Her eyes were emotionless, her face was expressionless, but this was her.

This was Snow White.

Chapter 2: Snow White and the Shepherd

☆ Mana

What the hell kind of alias is *The Magical Girl Hunter* anyways?

Ever since Snow White had been considered to become a member of the Examination Division, Mana had objected every time.

However, due to Snow White's actions, the Examination Division had no choice but to push for her unofficial employment.

Snow White's position is very troubling.

Being a survivor of Clamberry's tests means becoming an honorary member of the Land of Magic. That much is okay, but now that Snow White had resources, she began hunting down rogue Magical Girls.

For the most part, she hunted them down without the Land of Magic's permission, but always handed them over to the Examination Division.

She would even take tips from the Examination Division and act on them. After all, she legally couldn't arrest someone if she wasn't officially in the Examination Division.

Because Snow White was doing an efficient job, the Examination Division decided to make her an honorary member.

External Staff they called her.

This gave her the legal right to arrest rogue Magical Girls while also granting them a layer of plausible deniability.

Snow White herself didn't care what they gave her, so long as she was able to keep doing what she was doing before.

Mana's journey to the Examination Division was different.

She was handicapped from the start, being a Mage trying to compete against Magical Girls. However, she kept studying and practicing.

“One day, I’ll become the best Examiner”

Mana’s journey to becoming one of the best in the Examination Division was harder than any Magical Girl by comparison. It’s extremely rare for a Mage to outclass a Magical Girl, so doing that in itself was a trial.

But she finally made it.

This was different from Snow White. Mana disliked Snow White, especially considering how she acts and how she got into the Examination Division.

They have worked together before.

Once.

Mana was assigned a case and Snow White was her partner. That was the one time she worked with Snow White.

It was horrible.

She was annoying.

She went ahead on her own, didn’t follow any of Mana’s orders, and couldn’t care less about cooperating with her.

If Mana got into her temper tantrums, Snow White would always easily shut her down immediately.

She was efficient, but a pain to work together with.

Still, Mana was older than her, so she had to keep her cool. She can’t lash out against a rookie Magical Girl.

Sometimes Snow White would even leave her Mascot at base when pursuing a dangerous target, without telling Mana or her Mascot on where she was going to go.

The Mascot, Fal, would talk to Mana about Snow White.

“She’s not as bad as you think, Pon.”

“She’s just misunderstood, Pon.”

“Really, she’s a nice girl, Pon.”

“Snow White wants to join the Examination Division, Pon! She just won’t say it”

“Snow White... she actually respects you, Pon. A lot, Pon!”

“She’s just not good with people, and is trying to protect you by going ahead. Trust me on this one, Pon!”

The Mascot kept saying these things endlessly. It’s clear that the Mascot was very close with Snow White. Mana can’t decide if that’s a good or bad thing.

Still, the case was over, and they arrested the rogue Magical Girl.

She never wants to work with Snow White ever again.

And yet, she’s looking for Snow White now. How ironic.

The Examination Division has access to several Magical Gates. These Gates allow teleportation to various locations in the Human World.

Unfortunately, there is no Gate that connects the Examination Headquarters and the base of any of the Three Sages.

The closest Mana can go to was W-City. From there, she’d have to take a car along the highway to reach Puck Manor.

A Magical Girl named Shadow Gale was kidnapped, Pfle is asking for assistance, and Snow White can’t be contacted.

There are hints that the Three Sages are involved with all of this.

Not only that, but there exists a possibility that the B-City Incident was also involved with this, somehow.

Mana has always been investigating the B-City Incident.

Even now, she wants to know what really happened.

Why did the people that died there have to die?

What reason do they have for the barrier? All those people?

Even though Mana doesn't know the answer to all these, it still pains her when she has to think about B-City.

It was a simple job.

They should've been chasing an Assassin. That was the job. One rogue Magical Girl, and a lot of backup and security.

Then, prisoners from the Land of Magic began interfering in events. She had no idea why. Land of Magic personnel were killed.

That had been painful incident, taking the lives of innocents, both humans and Magical Girls. It took the life of her sister.

She wanted to know the details of the incident in full, and why it happened. She kept saving it for later.

Navigating the blacklisted sections and forbidden articles of the various Divisions can be dangerous, and a journey of their own. It's not something you can fit in the middle of another mission.

The most progress she made in investigating B-City was from contacting a veteran Magical Girl of the Human Resources Division, as well as her close friend, 7753 .

7753 led her to Pfle, who she says has more information. Mana usually wants to classify a person that she met as either black or white.

She understands that there are gray areas, but a job's easier if you know who's on who's side.

When she met Pfle, her first instinct was black.

What she thought of, and what she spoke of, however, made her seem white.

But her instincts continue to tell her that at the rate she's going, she's headed into black.

That was her first meeting with Pfle. She didn't gain any other meaningful information about B-City from her, but ever since then, she

never trusted her.

So when Pfle visited the Examination Division, Mana was prepared to see through any trickery she had.

But Pfle actually looked very desperate, despite not showing it. Even if Pfle wasn't a Magical Girl, she would *still* seek out alternatives.

That's why Mana acted on Pfle's information. This is more than just a bluff. Pfle is desperate, and as they say, a cornered snake is more dangerous than a normal one.

Mana headed off to Puck Manor, while Pfle was waiting in the receptionist area of the Examination Division HQ.

Pfle had asked Mana to have a Magical Phone ready for her to communicate. Mana explained that she couldn't use the phone while driving. Pfle then said that it's fine, because Mana can put it on loudspeaker and place it in the passenger seat.

Mana sighed, but agreed. After all, she wanted to make sure Pfle was still waiting in the Examination Division. She didn't trust any of the guards to watch her.

"Personally, I'd love to leave the Puck Faction to the Osk Faction, but they have also been making moves lately," said Pfle through the loudspeaker.

Every time Pfle spoke, Mana got a little more irritated.

"You trying to act like my handler? You know I don't need to talk to you at all. Don't try to do Examination Division business and let me do my job," said Mana.

Truthfully, the Examination Division has been trying to stay away from cases related to the Three Sages.

The political consequences are too high, and there's not much proof they can use against the Sages themselves.

Mana could never agree with that. Her morals always trumped any procedure she had to go through.

She wondered if that was the proper mentality. After all, it's that kind of thinking that got her sister killed.

She thought of Hana. She missed her still, and she still wishes things ended up differently. A wonderful Examiner like Hana, lost from the world.

She jolted as the car nearly crashed. She can't think of what she lost when she's driving like this. That's too dangerous.

Sometimes she wondered if she should've taken the initiative to try and talk with her father too.

"Do you know where you're going?" asked Pfle.

"Yes, I do. Perfectly fine," replied Mana.

"Well, you're taking a lot of unnecessary detours."

"No, I am not. This is the route to the location."

"There's plenty of shortcuts on the way"

"I know where everything is. It's *perfectly fine* ."

"Either way, you're driving too fast."

"I'm not driving too fast"

"Drive any faster and you'll break the speed limit."

"No. I'm driving perfectly fine."

"Doesn't feel like it from here."

"From there? Wait, how the hell do you know how fast I'm driving, you're not even in the car!"

"Human Resources has ways of tracking down official Land of Magic vehicles. Oh, looks like you're speeding up, Mana..."

Mana rammed the brakes. She was so irritated she was unconsciously making the car go faster by stepping on the gas.

"There's a traffic jam up ahead," said Pfle.

"No there isn't."

“Yes there is. Up in the intersection ahead is a traffic jam.”

“How would you know that?”

“GPS, remember?”

“It’s the fastest road to our destination.”

“But it’ll take longer because of the traffic jam. I suggest we reroute.”

“No, we’re taking that road.”

“Take the underpass to your left.”

“Not gonna do that.”

“Mana, now you’re just being childish.”

“You should really stop talking.”

“The underpass really is the fastest way, trust me.”

Mana gritted her teeth and took the underpass route.

“That wasn’t so hard, right?” asked Pfle.

“...Sure.”

“By the way, you look quite young, Mana.”

“Oh what, you’re complimenting my appearance now?”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I mean that there’s a chance you’ll be stopped by the police.”

“For looking young?”

“Yes. You look around high school. They’ll stop you and ask for a driver’s license. Do you have one?”

“I have ID”

“But that’s the Examination Division ID, it’s not valid in the Human World.”

“I have my civilian ID.”

“I’m curious, did you take a picture of your ID with your witch costume?”

“Of course not!”

“Aw, but it would look so much better! You’re wearing your witch outfit right now, right?”

“...Hnggggh!”

“Oh, but my previous question. Do you have a *driver’s* license?”

“I can make one.”

“Have you never taken a driving test?”

“That doesn’t *matter*, I’ve made licenses before, it’s never failed me yet.”

“Mana, I’m shocked. I thought the Examination Division would at least train you with cars.”

“We have magic that can make the cars go on autopilot, we don’t need dedicated driving.”

“So all this time you don’t even know how to drive a car?”

“I *know* how to *drive* a car!”

“Mana... you’re speeding again.”

“Hey, hey, y’know, maybe I can drive a little better if you SHUT UP!”

“Oh, my apologies!”

Mana took a deep breath and continued driving steadily.

“Ah yes, before I forget, I should tell you Puk Puck’s powers.”

Oh, now she gets to the point .

“Puk Puck’s Magical Skill is dangerous. If you see her, then you will effectively become her friend. You’ll adore her, you’ll love her, and you’ll want to help her and do whatever it takes to make her happy. Since you’re headed to Puck Manor, I suggest caution. This can be an obstacle in your investigation, and there’s no known cure for it either.”

“Wait. How do you know her Magical Skill?”

“I’m in Human Resources. It’s in my business.”

“She’s a Sage, you don’t just get public knowledge of a Sage’s powers like that.”

“There are ways, and rumors and documents if you find them. Other factions will also try to make a move on her, most notably the Osk Faction, and their intel is useful. Also, I tested it.”

“You what?”

“I tested it. I know her powers work. She posts videos to websites. I know it works.”

“...Wait, are you saying-”

“It’s not as severe of an effect if you only watch a video. I believe it’s not just sight, but sound as well. The Osk Faction has been trying to replicate the power, perhaps to fight the Puck Faction.”

“Slow down. You’re telling me you tested it on yourself?”

A small silence before Pfle spoke again.

“...The video I saw was... breathtaking, to say the least. When I watched it, I did have feelings of adoration, and it’s difficult to describe or think about... and yes... You can say that the video captivated my heart. However, I’m fine now. Like I said, I believe it’s not as severe as facing her directly.”

“That only begs the question of why the Osk Faction knows about her powers.”

“The Osk Faction must have had countless trial and error tests. I only reaped their results. It would make sense, because if the Puck Faction moves, then the Osk Faction moves as well. They’re in conflict, you see, so intelligence is key.”

Mana listened in. This is going to be a long job.

☆ Uluru

Uluru didn’t expect such a light ‘prison’ for what Snow White has done.

She was only locked up in the drawing room, with nothing to keep her from leaving.

The drawing room itself was brightly lit and filled with cute little things, which doesn't suit the image of Snow White at all.

The lighting was provided by a chandelier hanging above the room. There were some kid tables and chairs as well.

Snow White still stared blankly at Uluru.

Uluru didn't know how to react. She gripped her popgun, and kicked the door closed. But she kicked it so hard it went flying back open and hit Uluru's head.

Disgruntled, she slammed the door with her hand.

She moved towards Snow White.

"Snow White! Your friend! What she did... Sachiko..."

There were so many things that Uluru wanted to let out. So many things that Uluru wanted to say to Snow White.

Seeing Snow White's face made her conflicted, but she was still angry about the part she played in Sachiko's death.

"...Just... Just... What were you even THINKING!?" shouted Uluru.

"I don't know."

"Huh!?"

That wasn't the response that Uluru expected. Snow White didn't reply in anger or anything like that.

She sounded like she considered herself worthless.

"Nothing? *Nothing*!? She was your friend... You said we could trust her! You TOLD me we could trust her!"

"She was being manipulated."

Uluru slammed the table.

"You think that EXCUSES her!? Sachiko's *dead* ! Sachiko's dead and that's not gonna change! It's never going to change..."

"The only one that would manipulate her is Pythie Frederica. I don't think she was in control of her actions."

"You.... You... You're not even LISTENING to me! You're the Magical Girl Hunter right!? You were supposed to STOP rogue Magical Girls, not let them KILL SOMEONE... You were supposed to.... You were supposed to help us... So why..."

Uluru couldn't hold back her tears as they started to flow out. She wanted to be angry but she was also sad.

Snow White still looked blankly at Uluru.

Uluru didn't know what to do. What was she supposed to say? Her sisters can't have died in vain.

...Was there really nothing she could do?

"Why are you asking me these things?" asked Snow White.

"Huh?"

"What do you want from me, Uluru?"

"I... Y-You..."

"Why did you come here?"

When Snow White looked back at Uluru, her face was that of anger and disgust. This wasn't the same Snow White that Uluru knew before.

"I've had enough of this," said Snow White.

She stood up, Uluru grabbed Snow White's shoulders from behind. She wanted to speak. She opened her mouth, but no words came out.

Snow White shrugged off Uluru's hand and turned around, towering over her.

"Are you expecting me to help you with something? Why do you think I'll help you? Huh!? Why! Why did you come here, Uluru!?"

Uluru bit her lip. Tears began streaming out of her eyes as she backed away. Snow White was angry. Uluru never saw Snow White like this.

Snow White was supposed to be the voice of reason. Calm, emotionless.

Uluru realized why she was so angry at Snow White. Uluru knew that the ninja was the one who killed her sister.

Snow White may be telling the truth that the ninja was manipulated.

Snow White had no reason to kill Sachiko. So why was Uluru so angry at Snow White?

Ever since Snow White began working for Puk Puck. Sorami and Sachiko looked up to Snow White as their leader.

Snow White displayed the traits of a leader. Sorami always seemed to gravitate more to Snow White as soon as she showed up. Sachiko also was calmer when Snow White analyzed the situation.

It wasn't just the way Snow White acted that made Uluru angry back then. It was always something else.

Finally, Uluru realized it.

Snow White was a better sister than Uluru could ever be. Because of that, she was angry at her. She didn't accept it, but that was the true reason.

In reality, Uluru did respect Snow White, but she couldn't see past that.

But, why did Uluru come here? Angry like this? Was it really to blame Snow White?

Uluru thought that she would feel better after confronting Snow White about Sachiko's death, but seeing Snow White like this only made Uluru worse.

And Uluru felt like she was partly responsible.

Uluru opened her mouth and spoke.

“Y-You’re wrong... This isn’t you... This isn’t you at all... Y-You’re always the one to keep her cool... You’re the one who everyone looks up to...”

“Stop it.”

“You’re reliable... You’re a kind person... Sachiko was a loner, but she opened up to you... Sorami too... This isn’t you... I was angry at that... I was angry at you for that...”

“Don’t you *dare* think you can put me on some high throne! Don’t you *dare* make me out to be someone I’m not!”

Uluru knows that Snow White is angry. Snow White must be looking for a way to vent her anger, just like Uluru.

...They were more alike than she thought.

Uluru grabbed Snow White and pulled her close.

“Listen to me! You’re a Magical Girl!”

“Shut up...”

“You came to help us... You came to help Sachiko because you’re a Magical Girl of justice!”

“Shut up!”

“You’re not supposed to be like this.”

“Let go of me!!!”

“You’re not being yourself!”

Snow White headbutted Uluru. Uluru was numbed by the pain and shock. The tears that were flowing from before continued to flow, but this time, she felt her nose bleeding.

Uluru looked up at Snow White, whose face was consumed with anger.

“You’re a Magical Girl of justice!”

“Shut up, Uluru...”

"If you keep being angry at what you lost, you're going to go rogue, just like the others"

"Stop!"

Snow White covered her ears.

Surely Snow White can read Uluru's heart. She was telling the truth. This isn't the Snow White that she respected and known.

Uluru realized that she was never angry at Snow White. She never truly blamed Snow White. She was angry that her sisters died, and that she couldn't be the older sister she could.

She had been projecting that anger onto Snow White the whole time.

Now, Uluru wanted to tell Snow White how much she actually means to her sisters, and how Uluru respected her.

"You're the Magical Girl Hunter, right? You hunt down rogues! Your friend's being manipulated, so you need to hunt down the manipulator! That's why... That's why you're a Magical Girl"

"I *never* gave myself that title! People started calling me that! I allowed it, but I never asked for that."

"But there's a reason you didn't deny it. There's a reason you kept the title."

"I am *not* this... This person you think I am... I'm not this Ideal Magical Girl! I'm not some kind of savior! I'm not the Magical Girl you think I am!"

"And what about your friend? The one who was manipulated? You just gonna leave them like that? Huh?"

Snow White walked over to Uluru and grabbed her collar, lifting her up. She looked like she was ready to beat down Uluru.

"Well!? You don't look like you're going to do anything about it!" said Uluru.

Her heart was shaking. She was scared of Snow White. She may have struck too close to home. But this might be needed.

Snow White released her grip. She went back to her chair, sat down, and looked down at the floor.

Uluru looked down towards Snow White.

"I'm not going to tell you some sappy lie. If you don't want to be the Magical Girl that I believe you are, then I'm going to do it for you. My sisters are dead. Your friend is being manipulated. Whoever's at the top of that ladder is going to pay. I'm not going to forgive them."

The clouded emotions in Uluru's head cleared up. She knew what she wanted to do now.

"I'm going away. I'm going to find who manipulated your friend. I'm going to find who killed my sisters, and I'm going to give them a piece of my mind. And... I don't know about you... But I... I'd love to have your help..." said Uluru, wiping the blood from her nose.

Snow White looked up at Uluru.

"They're my enemies, but they were yours first. You sit this out, they win... I'm not good at encouraging people, so I'm not going to give you encouragement. But... I know what I'm going to do... What are you going to do?" asked Uluru.

Uluru placed her hand on the table, looking down at the table and away from Snow White.

"Sachiko cared about people. She cared so much that she didn't want to use her magic. Yeah, she's a crybaby... And yeah she can be cowardly... There's nothing wrong with that. She cares about people, though. Sorami also cared for people. She knew how they worked. I was never like that, even though I'm the eldest... I'm stupid... I'm stubborn... And... And... She deserved so much more..."

Uluru began crying again.

"I'm sorry about earlier... I'm willing to work together... I'll set you free... I... I really would appreciate it if you help me..." said Uluru in a soft voice, sniffling.

The silence between Snow White and Uluru lasted only a minute. Snow White stood up. She placed her hands on Uluru's own hands. Uluru glanced towards Snow White. She saw her smiling.

"I just feel like... I failed them..."

"Uluru... if you're really going to sneak me out, you'd be betraying Puk Puck. I can't ask you to betray the ones you love. That's something I can't do to anyone," said Snow White.

"Lady Puck... Lady Puck saved my life, and I owe her my gratitude... But... I can't just sit here... Something's wrong and I don't know what it is."

"I'm asking you if you're sure."

"I am..."

Snow White nodded.

Snow White's hands were the warmest pairs of hands Uluru's touched in a long time. It reminded her that it's been so long since she's had any physical contact with anyone.

Uluru wiped away her tears.

"I have a master key to the manor, and I can lead you out. Then... Then we can find who caused all this," said Uluru.

"Before we do that, we'll need my things. My weapons and my Magical Phone are in some warehouse. I need Fal with me on this."

"Warehouse 3. That's where they kept it. I'll go get it. You stay here okay?" said Uluru, finally confident in what she's doing.

Snow White nodded again.

As Uluru began to leave, she felt Snow White's hands touch her shoulders.

"Thank you," said Snow White.

"F-For what?"

"For relighting my fire. For reminding me of who I am."

Uluru lightly smiled and nodded, before leaving the room.

☆ Snow White

After Uluru left the room. Snow White took a deep breath. She bit her lip. Why is it that whenever someone's life was in danger, or someone had a huge misfortune fall upon them, that they kept trying to stick to Snow White?

Driving people away seems to be the only way to keep them safe.

Thinking about Ripple hurt Snow White, and knowing that she must've been manipulated made her hurt even more.

It got so bad that she just wanted to be away from most people. For their sake, more than her own.

She got into a fight with Uluru, but that girl was much stronger than she gave herself credit for.

Even when things are desperate, Uluru was thinking of the memories of her sisters. That was what Snow White heard in her heart.

Magical Girls are kind, beautiful, and pure beings. That was what Snow White thought once, she knows now that those are just naïve fantasies.

But Uluru's resolve, that was what being a true Magical Girl was about.

The willingness to protect those you care about, regardless of what happens to you. That was exemplified by La Pucelle.

The ability to see people for what they could become, even when they're at their worst. That was exemplified by Hardgore Alice.

The resolve to let no evil deeds go unpunished, no matter what the cost. That was exemplified by Princess Inferno.

That was what being a Magical Girl meant for Snow White. Now, Uluru was at her lowest. Uluru was trying to get back up, and Snow White was supposed to be these people for her.

Uluru reminded her of that. Uluru reminded Snow White of herself. Uluru reminded Snow White of what it means to really be a Magical Girl.

Why Snow White kept fighting all these years.

Snow White didn't want to betray the expectations of those that died, both for or because of her.

Snow White couldn't betray the expectations that Uluru had of her.

Footsteps.

She heard someone coming. She felt a cold chill on her spine. Someone was almost here. She could hear the voice of their heart.

Concern for the Land of Magic. This person wanted to save it.

So why does Snow White feel a sense of dread?

...Puk Puck.

Snow White remembered the words of the Osk Faction Magical Girl. How Puk Puck's powers worked.

So long as she doesn't see her, everything will be fine.

Snow White kept her eyes on the floor. The door opened. She heard footsteps.

Puk Puck was smiling at Snow White.

Snow White didn't see her face, so why can she feel her smile? Some kind of illusion?

"Good evening, Snow White!"

Puck's voice deepened the illusion. Snow White's chest began to hurt. It cramped up, her heartbeat was rising.

Snow White began sweating. She grabbed her chest.

Does her power work through her voice too?

"Y'know, I've always wanted to talk to you about how you defeated Grim Heart! No one else was able to do something like that! You know

what that means? Means you're special! You're super special! Not to mention super cool for being able to beat her! Wonderful job, Snow!"

Puck's praise entered her mind. Snow White felt pleasure washing over her. Every word of praise that Puk Puck spoke made her...

...Happy.

She was happy...

Praise me more...

She wanted Puk Puck to say good things about her. For some reason, Puck's praises were something she never realized she wanted.

Let me serve you...

She wanted to make Puk Puck happy. Puk Puck deserved all the happiness in the world.

She thought of these things, but still kept her eyes to the ground.

Puk Puck stood in front of her.

"Hey, Snow? Y'know... I *really* think we could be good friends! I wanna try being friends with you. Start over. Let bygones be bygones! So... please? Lemme get to know you better? Let's be friends, Snow! Everyone's here! It'll be so much fun!"

Puk Puck wanted to befriend Snow White.

Fun? Will it really be fun?

"Hey, I know what'll seal the deal! You know Shadow Gale, right Snow? She's my friend too! She's here with me! Right now! Oh, you two are gonna get along so well with each other! It'll be so much fun! You will be friends, won't you? Won't you?"

Shadow Gale?

The Black Nurse Magical Girl that Snow White met before.

She's here, too? If she's here...

...Then everything's okay, right?

Shadow Gale is friends with Puk Puck. I can be friends and have fun with Shadow Gale... right?

"All you gotta do is say yes, Snow! Everyone's trying to help me activate this device, you see? There's been some terrible tragedies recently. Uluru lost her sisters and she's been all lonesome lately, poor girl... If you be my friend, I'm sure I can properly introduce you to her! Uluru's been with the family for years now!"

Snow White thought of Uluru.

That's right. She's been with her for years... How bad... could it be...?

"Yeah? Snow?"

Snow White was looking at the floor. Sweat was pouring from her forehead, her heartrate's rising, and her body was heating up from the stress. She was gritting her teeth.

She couldn't speak. It was taking her all of her energy to not look up.

But there's a beautiful girl right in front of me...

...Why do I have to stare at this boring ugly floor, when there's a beautiful girl waiting for me?

The pain was too much to endure.

Puk Puck touched Snow White's shoulders, and smiled at her.

Snow White looked up.

In front of her was the face of Puk Puck, smiling warmly and happily towards Snow White. Upon seeing her face, Snow White's cheeks began blushing, and her heartrate sped up.

Snow White's eyes widened.

Her heartbeat calmed down.

Snow White's eyes were filled with nothing but bliss and joy, and a smile slowly formed in her face.

"Okay! Let's be friends!" said Snow White happily.

“Really? Yay! I’m so glad you reconsidered! It’s gonna be great to have you on the team, Snow!”

“Lady Puck.”

“Yes, Snow?”

“Uluru wanted to sneak me away from you earlier. She’s off to get my stuff and packing my bags. If I ran away, I wouldn’t be able to help you, so I decided to tell you this... But please go easy on Uluru, okay? I feel really bad for her...” said Snow White.

“Oh my, Uluru’s become a bit mischievous, huh? Don’t worry about her, Snow!”

I have to repay my debt to Lady Puck. I should tell her everything. Then she’ll be happy.

If Lady Puck is happy, then I’ll be happy too!

“Lady Puck”

“Yes, Snow?”

“Make me more useful? Please?”

“Ah, don’t worry! Everything’s all planned out! You’ll be *very* useful, Snow!”

Hearing her reassurance made Snow White very happy. This was the first time she’s felt this happy in forever.

“Lady Puck? Where are my belongings? Could you get them to me? I wanna help you as much as I can!”

“Oh, you want me to go get ‘em? What’s in your stuff, Snow?”

“Fal is there, Lady Puck! He’s a really good Cyber Fairy! Honest! He’s the best Cyber Fairy you can ever ask for! He’s a really good friend! I miss him so much, and I’m sure he’d be just as happy to help you! Could I see him again?”

“Of course, Snow! Now that you say that, it all makes perfect sense! I’ll get your stuff soon!”

Puk Puck rubbed Snow White in the head, and Snow White replied by giggling and grinning happily.

“I knew it was a good idea to use my magic on you, Snow!”

“...Thank you!”

“Oh? What for?”

“Thank you for using your magic on me! Thank you for befriending me!”

“Ehehe, you’re just too important to leave out, Snow! I’m super glad we’re friends now!”

☆ Uluru

The warmth from where Snow White grabbed Uluru’s hand began to cool again. Uluru didn’t want it to go away. It’s been so long since she’s felt the touch of a person who cared for her.

Sorami was gone, and Sachiko was gone.

But Snow White is still here.

She was in trouble. She needed help. That’s what Magical Girls do, right? They help people. Uluru’s going to become that kind of Magical Girl.

She’s going to help her.

She made her way past the Magical Girls that were working in the main hallway of the manor. There were several warehouses behind them.

Those are the places where Uluru should look first.

A variety of Magical Girls arrived on the location. Some of them came to have fun, some of them came on Puk Puck’s orders.

Warehouse 3 wasn’t as guarded. However, it was locked. A padlock that Uluru had to break open somehow.

She took out her popgun rifle. With the butt of the rifle, she bashed open the padlock.

One.

Two.

Three.

Finally, it broke. Uluru gained entry to the warehouse 3. Now to find where Snow White's bag was.

She searched through the items, until she found what seemed to be a bag with a star on it. Rummaging through it, she saw Snow White's Magical Phone.

Uluru grabbed the phone and turned it on.

A stereoscopic image of a Cyber Fairy popped out of the phone.

“What!? What happened, Pon? Where am I, Pon!?”

“Shhh! Shhh! Be quiet! I’m here to rescue you!”

Uluru heard footsteps and shouting. Magical Girls were running over to them. She heard some of the girls talking.

“Find Uluru.”

“Take her in alive.”

“Don’t hurt her, but capture her.”

Uluru gulped. She placed Fal in the bag, and took out Snow White’s halberd. She had to get out of the warehouse.

She looked for a window up above. The halberd should be able to handle it.

These Magical Girls must have found out that she was trying to escape. How would they know? Uluru only told Snow White.

She climbed anything she could to reach the windows, and when she did, she smashed it open with a halberd.

In the rush of her escape, the halberd got caught in the windows. Uluru screamed out in rage and tried to pull it back, but then she tripped out the window.

She fell, and Snow White's Magical Phone popped out of her bag.

Fal showed up again.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, PON?"

"Shhhhh!!!!"

Uluru picked up the noisy fairy and placed it back in the bag. There was no way to get back to the manor now.

If Uluru snuck around, she'd eventually get caught.

Shit! Fuck!

Dammit Sachiko! Why did you have to escape...

...Sachiko

Uluru instinctively blamed her sister. Premium Sachiko had a 4-leaf clover motif. The motif of luck. Though usually she brought bad luck instead.

Uluru tended to blame any misfortune on her. It was childish. Sorami would comfort Sachiko, but Uluru was stubborn.

...She didn't mean to do those things.

Uluru held back her tears. This wasn't Sachiko's fault. None of this was her fault. Uluru's the eldest sister, so she was the one who was supposed to take responsibility.

She remembered the blood that she got from her nose earlier. This burden wasn't something she should give to Sachiko.

Uluru had to take responsibility too. That's right. She's going to save people.

So she *will* take responsibility.

She snuck in through the shrubbery, going from bush to bush, avoiding any Magical Girls in the area.

Sachiko. You were always the unlucky one, even though your outfit is a 4-leaf clover. You couldn't become the lucky girl like your namesake.

Instead of being Miss Fortune, you always had misfortune. Is that why you were always crying?

But today, Uluru's sure you'll become like your namesake.

Wherever you are, help me out a bit, okay?

Uluru heard a voice from somewhere. It can't be Sorami, nor can it be Sachiko. It's definitely not Uluru's voice.

It's neither Puk Puck nor Snow White's voice.

They were loud voices, and they didn't belong to anyone in the manor. Uluru looked for the source.

The main gate.

It was slightly open, and there were some Magical Girls talking to each other.

Uluru prayed to Sachiko. Then she made a run for it.

☆ Mana

Mana thought her troubles would be over after she arrived at her destination. Turns out that wasn't the case.

"I'm an investigator. I'm authorized to go in," said Mana.

"Lady Puck needs to give you permission before you enter these grounds."

"Then go get Lady Puck's permission!"

"I cannot"

"Why?"

"Because I must guard the gates from any possible intruders."

Mana felt like she was talking to a brick wall. This Magical Girl's attitude was brash and rude. She's not listening to anything Mana says at all.

She obviously wants Mana to leave, but Mana isn't giving up.

"Look. I've got reports that say Snow White was last seen in Puck Manor, I need to make sure she's there, and that gives me reason to investigate, now let me in."

"I don't know anything about Snow White visiting this manor."

"I've *also* got reports that a Magical Girl named Shadow Gale went missing and was last seen being brought here."

"I don't know anything about that either."

"Okay, look. If you don't want to let me in, could you contact Lady Puck or someone of authority to let me through? You have a Magical Phone, you don't even need to leave your post."

"I don't have a Magical Phone."

"Bullshit. That's impossible."

"Say whatever you want, but it's the truth."

And she thought talking to Pfle was bad. Pfle just seemed like she wanted to annoy Mana, but this girl is actively trying to prevent her from getting in.

"If you can't let me inside, then bring Snow White to me."

"Isn't this an official investigation? Do you have a warrant?"

"Listen-"

Mana was interrupted by the sound of some screaming from the Manor grounds. Mana tried to look through the gaps between the mansion gates.

"What was that? What's going on in there?" asked Mana.

"We're not obliged to let you know what happens inside the premises. You're not allowed to peek inside either."

"I don't care if it's the Three Sages, the Land of Magic, or the Human World. If something's going on there, that means I, as an officer of the law, have to investigate! It's my obligation to-"

Before Mana could finish her sentence, the Magical Girl fell down towards her, and suddenly Mana was carrying the weight of two people.

Instinctively, Mana moved to protect the back of her head. The Magical Girls collapsed in front of her, and rolled away from her body, standing up.

Just as instantly, 2 Magical Girls appeared from within the gate. One had a cane with cute decorations, one had a strangely shaped sword.

Mana slowly began to get up, and she saw the three Magical Girls staring at her.

There was another Magical Girl next to her, holding a popgun rifle, breathing heavily.

“Protect her!” said a voice from Mana’s Magical Phone.

Mana opened her right hand and directed her right arm towards the three Magical Girls.

“You guys have some guts to commit violence in front of an inspector! I wanna hear about what’s going on here!”

Not 5 seconds have passed, and both the Magical Girls around her as well as Mana felt a chill up her spine.

The hairs on Mana’s back stood up.

Before Mana could say anything, the three Magical Girls have already moved into position.

Mana placed her hand into her pocket, she pulled out a container of healing medicine, however, by the time she looked back up, everything was over.

Mana is a Mage. She has human reactions. Magical Girls aren’t restricted by that at all. They outclass humans in every way.

In the time it took for Mana to grab her Healing Medicine, the cane Magical Girl created a radial circle below her, but was blown away.

The Magical Girl with a sword phased inside the walls of the gate.

Another Magical Girl came from behind her. This one had her arms and legs completely covered in ice.

The kind of shadow dog bit the Sword Magical Girl's ankle, and it dragged her down.

"Enemies at the gate!" shouted the gatekeeper.

Just then, the Ice Magical Girl, with a trident, rushed towards the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper had her guard up, blocking with her arms, but the Trident Girl kicked her, the force launching the guard towards the manor.

"What are you doing? Get out of there!" shouted a voice from Mana's Magical Phone.

Mana got up, and dragged the hand of the Popgun Magical Girl with her. She quickly headed towards their car and opened the door.

Various Magical Girls came out of Puck Manor to join the fight. Looking back, Mana saw black winged creatures in the sky.

...Homunculi?

She saw a dark Magical Girl, shadows coming out of her body, landing on the ground.

Blasts and gunshots and blades were heard.

There was no time to stay here. Mana dumped the Magical Girl in her car and got in the driver's seat.

She started the engines of the car, and like a rocket, it rushed out at high speed.

"Well, the Puck Faction has just committed a crime. Attacking an investigator from the Examination Division for no apparent reason. Despite the unexpected accident, this actually has some good results. The Osk Faction may well lend their support if we bring news of this," said Pfle from Mana's Magical Phone.

An accident?

Yes, that was an unexpected, if not very coincidental accident. The timing was good. When Mana was very much in trouble, she was suddenly assisted by two Magical Girls and an army of Homunculi.

They only showed up after the gatekeeper began acting aggressively to her.

Mana couldn't help but think that Pfle planned all that. Using Mana as a piece. Moving her into Puck Manor in order to incite a cause for the Puck Faction to be targeted.

Attacking a member of the Examination Division is a major crime, and in doing that, the Puck Faction might well lose influence within the Land of Magic.

That's why Pfle insisted on having the Magical Phone on Mana. She needed to time the strike perfectly, in order to get Mana out and make it not look like an attack.

Mana sighed, and she pushed the pedal on the gas, leaning forward as she zoomed away.

Chapter 3: Let's Be Friends

☆ Pfle

"No, I insist. Ah, and my name's Pfle."

"Lethe"

"A pleasure. And Hammer, Shufflin 2, Hearts 2 and 3 I presume?"

The three Magical Girls took a seat in their own chairs.

Pfle smiled, and turned her right hand towards the windows.

"Allow me to thank you again for inviting me. This room is lavishing. The carpets are soft and the view is absolutely gorgeous."

"No need for thanks. This room is as good as any for a meeting, hm? Originally, I thought you'd be embarrassed of a place like this... It would certainly be helpful if we could receive the aid of the Human Resources Division."

"That would be a pleasure indeed."

"So, Pfle, hm? I had heard you come bearing gifts?"

Pfle nodded at the words of Lethe.

"The first gift doesn't come from my position in Human Resources however. You see, there's a kidnapped Magical Girl in Puck Manor. In response to a tip, an Examiner came to investigate. However, it seems she was attacked by Puk Puck's Magical Girls. She ran away, of course, out of danger"

"Ohoho... A wonderful opportunity. Ah, wait, correct me if I'm wrong, but you're involved in this somehow, hm? Seems you have a rather mischievous streak, hm?"

"But of course! If we're going to do what we're planning to do, we can't do it without a cassus belli. We now have actual cause for investigating Puck Manor, and investigating Puk Puck herself."

“Then I’ll arrange that.”

“However, even though Puk Puck carelessly attacked an Examiner, do you think they have enough time to launch a counter-investigation? Do you think Puk Puck can leave before the official team comes? If she decides to cancel all preparations and just leave immediately.”

“Puk Puck will take a while. Firstly, no matter how fast she tries, she needs about one hour to change her clothes. 2 hours if you consider her moving everywhere. The Examination Division has enough time to process the legal requirements with my help in less than 30 minutes. We move the Examination Division to her manor, and confiscate anything we need.”

“Haha... Then I’ll also do my part of the arrangements.”

With all the talking, Pfle clapped her hands.

“Well then, you should also contact the ruins. Consolidate your defenses, and gather an army.”

“Hammer, you’ll handle that, right?”

“Y-Yes. I’ll handle it,” said Hammer.

Pfle nodded. She raised her right arm, and extended her middle and index finger upwards.

“The second gift I have for you is information. From a reliable source. It seems Puk Puck is planning on using the device to befriend every Magical Girl in the world.”

“Befriend?”

“Yes. Befriend. Should she succeed, everyone will adore her and become her closest friends. Even if they’re hostile to her. That means even you and me. I wonder how that would work, but I’m not sure on the specifics. The goal may seem simple, but there must be something more. If we have more information, we can figure out her endgame.”

“Hm, understood. Hammer, tell the research group, Puk Puck is planning to befriend all Magical Girls.”

"Noted," replied Hammer.

"Now then. Human Resources is normally useful for gaining information. However, now we're in need of an army. We'll need mercenaries. Now, I'm not sure how accurate this information is. This may be Puck propaganda, but it seems like there are rumors that the Osk Faction produces experimental Magical Girls. Because of that, it seems that not many Magical Girls would lend themselves a hand to the Osk Faction. Troublesome."

Hearing Pfle's words, Hammer nodded her head. "That's definitely a problem."

Pfle smiled.

"Well, that's where I come in. I've already secured several mercenaries. I can confirm they aren't under the influence of Puk Puck. They are my men, and they'll respond to me. I'm responsible for them. Clearly from Human Resources. Ladies, may I present you our very own one-man army Magical Girls."

Hammer grabbed the file Pfle had.

"Let's see here. A Magical Girl who can manifest shadows... and a Magical Girl... with a trident... who can... control water... er..."

"They seem rather powerful, no? Ah, correction, they *are* powerful. You won't find any better Magical Girls than them."

"Yeah... I mean... They're pretty skilled... it seems..."

"Hammer. Your face is pale, hm?"

"Ah, no it's not! I'm perfectly healthy! Nothing wrong with my face at all, right?"

Pfle placed her hands on the table, drinking a white chocolate milk.

"Pfle. May I have some of that chocolate milk, hm?"

"Of course. Please do. As many as you wish."

"The taste melts in your mouth. It's been a while since I drank something like this. By the way, what do you hope to gain from all of this? The Caspar Faction wish to gain our resources in return for their cooperation, but I see no gain for you or the Human Resources Division. Curious, hm?"

"I have my reasons."

"And what would they be, hm? Is it fame? Is it glory? Clearly you don't want materialistic gifts. Are you simply a good Samaritan, hm?"

"I don't care about being remembered. My goals are not so abstract as you might think. I have a concrete goal, and I will benefit if everything goes according to plan."

"But I'd rather you tell me those benefits, lest I play into a trap, hm?"

"I've told you my sources, and the information you need. That should be enough."

"*Your* sources. I don't know if I trust you unless I know you seek to gain something from this."

"Very well. As you know, Puk Puck is collecting Magical Girls. She's befriending everyone, she's increasing her forces. There is a Magical Girl named Shadow Gale. She's being held there against her will. Thanks to Puk Puck's magic, she's hopelessly fascinated by Puk Puck, adoring her and serving her unconditionally."

"And what is she to you, hm?"

"...She's my subordinate."

"Hm?"

"The point is, I'm going to rescue her. That's my benefit."

"A good boss then, hm? I respect that. The safety of subordinates comes first, and someone like that is worth allying with. Is it possible to break her free of Puk Puck's spell, though?"

"...I think there's definitely a way..." said Hammer.

"What's that, Hammer? Did you say something, hm?"

"No... nothing, nevermind," replied Hammer.

"I've tried many times to rescue her, but to no avail. She's being held tightly by her. Somewhere I can't reach without help. I know it's going to be a struggle. I'm prepared for that," said Pfle.

"Do you have any objections, Hammer?" asked Lethe.

"No... I'm fine with it."

"Wonderful! Well then. As you'll be at the center of things, it'll be easier for you to direct things like assassinations. I don't want any wreckage or unnecessary chaos, after all. With no complaints, I'll just have your signature as a seal of approval, and let us cooperate!"

☆ Puk Puck

Rest. Puk Puck needs to rest. Slow down and think about things a bit.

Recently, she had just lost a very important friend. Her recklessness and callous behavior caused her to run away.

Puk Puck's Magical Skill does have limitations. If she focuses too much on befriending one person, then others may become ignored as a result. It's the nature of friendship.

Uluru leaving was Puk Puck's fault. The more she thought about Uluru leaving, the more painful it is to Puk Puck.

Puk Puck sighed, her heart was filled with sadness.

She had heard that when Uluru left the manor, there was a Mage from the Examination Division.

She stole Uluru, so Puk Puck's friends tried to save her. Still, she managed to escape with her daughter.

She placed a smile on her face. She had to do this, for her friends that worked hard for her.

She told them all, "Thank you! Thank you all so much!"

And she really was thankful. She was grateful to all of them for wanting to help her in this time of need.

She was also worried. Her friends attacked an Examination Division Mage. The Osk Faction would see this and regard it as a *just cause* to attack.

In other words, the Osk Faction will try to disturb the ritual. That'll be troubling. Puk didn't want that.

Puk Puck talked to Snow White about it. She would know what to do. She suggested that they should move immediately, before they could react.

Puk Puck agreed, and went to change clothes.

Snow White stopped her. She proposed that Puk Puck change clothes in the car. It was a rude proposal, to change clothes in a car instead of a proper place.

However, Puk Puck thought more about it. Snow White was a new friend of Puk Puck. Her thoughts were fresh.

Snow White was known for her resourcefulness. Certainly, a little bit of freshness wouldn't hurt.

Puk Puck accepted Snow's proposal, and Snow happily agreed to guard her in the car.

Puk Puck counted 66 turns since she left the grounds of the manor. Afterwards, her body felt light.

The scenery outside the window blurred and thinned with a bright light. The GPS on the truck displayed an error. Puk Puck's body felt light.

Her head began shaking, and her consciousness was also slightly shaken.

It was only for a moment, and Puk Puck's body jolted back to normal. The nausea she felt would always be there.

Teleportation is never easy. Puk Puck had grabbed hold of Snow White's hand for safety. When she looked out, the scenery had changed.

It looked like a different world outside.

In this world, because cute things weren't considered useful, they weren't there. It was barren and desolate.

Nothing but the horizon surrounded the trucks. There were no animals, and there were no plants either.

Following these roads would eventually take her to the ruins, and by extension, the device.

The device was created by the First Mage. It was, in essence, a gift from God. Unfortunately, the Osk Faction has taken to guarding it.

Walls, barriers, fortifications, surrounded with Magical Girls trained solely for combat.

Even though Osk and Caspar are being friendly with each other, it still made Puk Puck sad that they couldn't understand.

Puk Puck tried to talk to them, but they wouldn't listen. They didn't understand that now is the best time to activate the device.

The trucks stopped, and the Magical Girls got out of it.

Puk Puck gathered all the Magical Girls at her convoy. They all asked her, "The other Factions are against you. Is this okay, Lady Puck?"

And Puk Puck replied, "Of course it is! I'm doing this for the benefit of the Land of Magic! I have you guys to support me!"

All the Magical Girls then started crying tears of joy. They were so inspired that Puk Puck was willing to go this far for their sake.

Puk Puck wiped every single one of these Magical Girls' tears away with a soft magical handkerchief, which they gleefully accepted.

After wiping away Snow White's, she cheerfully smiled on and led the other Magical Girls forward. With Snow White as their leader, they're unstoppable.

They trekked through some mountains. Between those mountains lies a valley. Inside that valley was the entrance to the ruins.

The entrance had a gigantic gate blocking the path.

There was no way inside. They had already preemptively disagreed on allowing Puk Puck entry.

Before they even met Puk Puck, it seems like they didn't even want to try to be friends.

The Magical Girls following Puk Puck had a dark look on their faces. They all thought the same thing.

A life without knowing the friendship of Puk Puck is a sad life indeed.

Puk Puck touched her palms to the door.

"Hey, heeey! Mr. or Ms. Gatekeeper person? Can you hear me? Hellooo?"

The air felt still. The sounds were quiet.

"Can you hear Puk's voice?"

Every Magical Girl behind Puk Puck was silent.

"Listen... This gate's being controlled from the inside, and I can't really open it from out here, so if you could pleaaase spare a moment to hear Puk out?"

There was a camera being pointed at Puk Puck. Perhaps they used it to see visitors. Puk Puck turned her head to the camera, gave a small wink, and blew a kiss to it.

"C'mon! Let's be friends!" said Puk Puck.

The ground shook, and the gate slowly moved apart, until it was finally open.

"Aw, thanks a bunch you guys!" said Puk Puck.

Puk Puck and her group went all the way back to the truck convoy. Puk Puck happily sat in the passenger seat.

The Magical Girl driver felt happy that Puk Puck chose her truck, and with a smile on her face, she asked her, “Did you open the gate, Lady Puck?”

“Oh no, I didn’t. I became friends with the Gatekeeper! They opened the gate! You should thank them!”

“My apologies, Lady Puck. I was so rude in assuming...”

“Aw, there’s no need to apologize! We’re almost there, so let’s GO !”

Puk Puck pointed forward as she shouted ‘Go!’

From here on out, they’re in Osk territory. Puk Puck hoped for the best.

She turned on the truck’s radio. A song that she didn’t know came up. Despite the Three Sages being all-powerful, they don’t know *everything*.

“Y’know, Snow. I wanna let you in on a little secret. We’re called the Three Sages, but we’re not all-knowing. There’s still things like this song that we gotta experience! It’s fun to get to know new things... *and* new people! I’m glad we became friends, Snow! Are you glad too?” asked Puk Puck.

Snow White nodded happily, “Mhm!”



Puk Puck sat closer, placing her palm on top of Snow White's palm.

Snow White gasped, and looked dumbfounded for a split-second. Puk Puck stared at her face, and Puk Puck let out a chuckle and a smile.

Seeing that, Snow White blushed, and a small smile appeared on her face.

Snow White gripped Puk's hand tightly, and Puk Puck felt happy of that.

Puk Puck opened the windows and looked outside. Snow White gasped in fear.

"Lady Puck! That's dangerous! Be careful okay, I don't want you hurt"

"It's alright, Snow! You're holding my hands, so I know you'll keep me safe, right?"

Snow White's eyes widened. She smiled and nodded, grasping Puk Puck's hands tighter as Puk Puck took her head outside the window.

The winds rushing into her face. Puk Puck enjoyed that sensation. The trucks were speeding at around 120 km/h. The dust tracks rolled off from the convoy.

She's been here many times before, but this is the first time she actually felt happy coming back here.

Inside the tunnels leading towards the device, several Magical Girls with weapons shouted at the trucks. Puk Puck couldn't register what they were saying, but she didn't mind it.

The Magical Girls ran towards the trucks, weapons at the ready, but when they saw Puk Puck passing by, they dropped their weapons instantly, looking stunned as Puk Puck waved at them. With that single look, they all had smiling happy faces. Giggling, blushing, smiling, only joy existed in their hearts as Puk Puck passed them by.

It continued on until they reached another checkpoint.

However, just then, the truck that Puk Puck was on braked instantly, and slid across the roads.

The second truck tried to do the same, but fell down sideways.

The sound it made was huge as it crashed down. Because it was so sudden, Puk Puck jumped in her seat.

"Oh gosh... I hope they're okay!" said Puk Puck as she exited the truck.

Puk Puck and Snow White exited the truck together. The Magical Girl driver opened the door as well.

Puk Puck kept a smile on her face as always. It's important to do that in front of your friends, after all.

The Magical Girl in the driver's seat of the fallen truck came out crawling from the driver's seat.

The Magical Girls managed to retrieve the containers from inside the trucks, some were hurt and were being carried by other Magical Girls too.

The Magical Girls that caused the truck collapse began crying, as if she failed Puk Puck.

Puk Puck calmed her down with a hug. She gathered up all the Magical Girls under her protection.

Today, she'll pour more love into them than usual. All the Magical Girls lined up in front of Puk Puck.

Puk Puck stood on her own in front of all of her friends, who eagerly awaited her words.

"Everyone! Thank you so much for all you've done for me! I'm really grateful to you all! Let's all work together, okay?"

All the Magical Girls thrusted their right hand, curled into a fist, into the air,

Together, they made a united shout.

"YEAH!"

Puk Puck smiled, "I knew I could count on you all! Welcome our new friends together too! Make them part of your family! So let's all lend a helping hand to each other and make this all work out, okay?"

Once again, with determination and happiness on their faces, they shouted out together,

"OKAY! LET'S DO IT!"

All the Magical Girls then wore the gas masks they retrieved from the trucks, and just as quickly, all of them rushed into the ruins ahead.

★ CQ Angel Hammer

Hammer packed her luggage. She packed it all with battle equipment, and was preparing herself for the journey ahead.

After all their preparation, Puk Puck simply steamrolled through every defense.

First, it seems that the Gatekeeper Magical Girl fell under Puk Puck's magic through the camera. She happily allowed Puk Puck inside.

Then, Puk Puck defeated the entire defense group without even trying.

What's worse is that the defense group Magical Girls all joined her Faction afterwards.

Death would've been a much better fate for those veterans.

The ruins were completely hijacked.

Hammer became furious just reading the report. She was at her hotel room. Negative thoughts filled her head.

She wanted to slam her hands on the table, but she stopped midway, realizing that her strength would just crush the table.

She calmed down a bit, and looked forward.

Lethe was staring at her, while relaxing on the sofa.

The Shufflins had a fearful expression on their face.

"You shouldn't explode in anger in front of others, Hammer. You understand, hm?"

"U-Understood. Apologies."

Hammer kept her eyes on Lethe. She had a suggestion to make.

"W-We should head to the ruins. If we don't it'll be too late, and Puk Puck will activate the device."

“Ohoho... And is there any other way, hm?”

“Puk Puck attacked the Examination Division. Puk Puck forcibly took the ruins. We now have a reason to fight back. Because Puk Puck’s on the wrong side of the law, we have that protecting us. The Land of Magic will surely support us in this situation. However, Puk Puck’s army grows every time she meets someone, I don’t think we can fully match that.”

“What do you suggest, hm?”

“By the time we gather enough manpower to present a challenge to Puk Puck, she’ll already have started the ritual. So, I’d like to go to the ruins myself. With the strength that I can gather immediately, I feel like it might be enough to stall. We’ll need over 100 Magical Girls at least, probably 1000 Homunculi to challenge Puk Puck. Since we’re fighting a Sage, having a general of our own be there will provide a significant morale boost!”

“I like your determination. However, do you really think you can take on one of the Three Sages directly, hm?”

“Well, if I can’t fight them, I’ll just... have to think of something else, I guess.”

Stupid. That’s not what you should’ve answered.

Hammer wanted to think of something else to add. Anything else. That seemed like a very dumb response to give to Lethe.

Lethe smiled, and got off her chair. It was so sudden that the Shufflins nearby immediately tried to hold her long dress skirt so it won’t touch the floor.

“Well, let’s go, hm?”

“O-Oh, understood!”

Hammer followed Lethe as she led the way outside. Staying behind her at all times.

“So, it seems that Puk Puck began moving quite fast, hm? Not taking any time at all it seems, hm?”

"Ah, yeah. Guess the whole changing clothes thing really didn't factor into the equation," said Hammer.

She felt nervous. That sounded like a slight against Lethe, and she didn't want it to sound that way. She just thought that the changing clothes reasoning was rather idiotic.

"Either way, Puk Puck has now secured a large amount of land. She has her own playground where she fancies playing general, hm?"

"Should we tell Pfle?"

"That girl has her hands on every nook and cranny. I'm sure she'll find out sooner or later, hm?"

"Understood."

☆ Mana

In a miracle, Mana managed to escape from Puck Manor. She hasn't actually seen any of the Three Sages in person, but that was the closest she's ever gotten to one of them.

When she arrived back in Examination Division HQ, Pfle was nowhere to be found. Apparently, she went off to meet a Magical Girl from the Osk Faction.

The current situation escalated to outrageous heights.

The Puck Faction has been making moves to raid the First Mage's device in the ruins where it was stored.

If they wanted to prevent that, they would need an army. That isn't supposed to be the Examination Division's job.

However, it's unexpectedly fallen into Mana's hands.

And so, Mana decided to head to the meeting site, as a representative of the Examination Division. Mana got on a new car, and Uluru sat in the back seat.

The Magical Girl with the toy gun. Her name was Uluru. Although she supposedly serves underneath Puk Puck, for some reason she's running away from her manor.

Mana threw her Magical Phone at the passenger seat once more, putting it on loudspeaker.

"...Why did you save me?" asked Uluru.

"Because it seems you were in trouble," said the Magical Phone.

"Hngg..."

Mana could see Uluru's face getting redder on the rearview mirror. She asked her some questions.

"So why did you decide to go out on your own?"

"I DIDN'T GO OUT ON MY OWN!" shouted Uluru. The sudden outburst surprised Mana a bit. It looked like Uluru wanted to punch her from the back seat.

That would be bad, she didn't know if Uluru knows if Mana was a Mage, so a punch from a Magical Girl would cause serious damage. Uluru's face was so red that Mana was sure she was furious.

She tried asking from a different angle this time.

"What I meant was, why did you run? Why were you being chased? I don't understand."

"I was planning to go out of the mansion with Snow White. Something happened and now I got chased. That's all."

"Why were you trying to escape with Snow White?"

"Why do you always ask questions!?"

"Because I don't have answers"

"I gave you answers!"

"Not clear enough. I need more information."

“Auuugh, since the entire car ride you’ve been asking me ‘why why why why’, and I’ve always been answering, it’s getting annoying!”

“It may be annoying but without a clear picture I can’t do anything!”

“But I *gave* you answers!”

“They weren’t clear answers! I still need more info”

“HOW MUCH INFO DO YOU NEED?”

“As many as I *need* it to! Why were you trying to escape with Snow White!?”

“Because I promised to escape with her to fight the bad guys...”

She doesn’t seem to be lying at all, but her story still doesn’t make any sense. Snow White was said to be working together with Puk Puck. Why would she want to escape?

Was Puk Puck planning on sending spies outside of her manor? If so, Uluru would make a bad spy.

“Mana, perhaps you shouldn’t be talking to her in your... usual way,” said Pfle from the Magical Phone.

“What *usual* way?”

“Exactly. Uluru, was it? We just need to understand some things. We’re not planning to hurt you,” said Pfle.

Uluru seemed to at least calm down at Pfle’s words. Just then, from the rearview mirror, Mana spotted a distorted figure forming into a spherical shape.

“Uluru’s telling the truth, Pon!”

A Cyber Fairy?

“Uluru’s magic is to tell believable lies, Pon!”

Mana scowled.

“Then there’s no point asking her any questions, then.”

"You're wrong, Pon. Because if you think her story needs more explanation, then she's telling the truth, Pon!"

"...What?" asked Mana.

"Uluru's magic works best when she thinks she's telling a lie, Pon! If you believe her but continue to question her stories, she's probably telling the truth, Pon! Or at least what she believes to be the truth, Pon!"

This is the mascot that worked with Snow White, right? Mana recognized his will to defend those he believes upon.

When Mana worked with Snow White, he was so enthusiastic about defending Snow White's actions, Mana couldn't forget his behavior if she tried.

From what Mana knows of Snow White, she never wants to go out on a mission if Fal isn't involved somehow. The two were clearly close.

Of course, there's also loyalty to consider. This Cyber Fairy was extremely close to Snow White. He wanted to defend Snow White so much it felt like 10 people in one Cyber Fairy were trying to defend her at times.

Still, Mana trusted his word, more than she could trust a stranger.

"So, what you're telling me is... Her magic is to make the things she says believable, right?"

"Yes, but the key word is lies, Pon! Her magic focuses on her lying, Pon!"

"So how does it work?"

"Until you get proof that she's lying, you'll always believe her words, Pon! However, if she believes she's lying, her magic is stronger."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"When she says something that she believes is the truth, although you may believe her, it doesn't have to mess with your mind too much, Pon! After all, the truth should be believed, so her magic isn't as strong, meaning there's still room in your mind for doubt. For example, you may

still want to ask for more details. The fact that you're constantly questioning her is proof that she's telling the truth, Pon!"

"Okay... So let me summarize. If she's lying, her magic activates immediately, and forces me to believe her, period. If she's telling the truth, it's still possible for me to question further?"

"Something like that, Pon!"

From Mana's Magical Phone, there came a laughter.

"My my, Uluru. The full details of your magic are interesting and complicated,ahaha. Looks like with Mana's personality, you two are a perfect match,ahaha!"

Uluru's face became red, "D-DON'T LAUGH AT ME!"

Thinking too hard about Uluru's magic and how to tell if she's lying is going to give Mana a headache. For now, she just needs to trust her gut.

If Mana still wants to know more, Uluru's probably telling her the truth.

"Let's change the topic, what exactly is going on?" asked Mana.

"I've talked to the Osk Faction. I'm currently en route to the ruins, where the First Mage's Device is supposed to be. Mana, you should come too. I'd love to have you on our side," said Pfle.

"You're ordering *me* around? You understand your position, right?" asked Mana.

"Well, it's an emergency of course."

Mana slammed the brakes on the car. The Magical Phone flung forward to the floor.

☆ Princess Deluge

Deluge's mission was clear. Fight off Puk Puck's Magical Girls, but don't advance. After the coast is clear, she was to retreat. This was emphasized by Pfle very clearly.

When she asked Pfle after the short battle, Pfle replied that she had secured an alliance with the Osk Faction, and Deluge was relieved.

Relieved?

Why was she relieved? Isn't Osk the enemy?

Pfle then gave her instructions to head towards a place known as 'The Ruins'. There, both the Osk and Puck Faction should be in the same place.

For now, Deluge should hurry and join them.

Deluge shut off her Magical Phone. She relayed her instructions to Dark Cutie, Glassianne, and Blue Bell Candy.

Dark Cutie nodded. Glassianne made a disgusted face. Blue Bell Candy timidly nodded, and looked down to the ground, avoiding eye contact.

Deluge approached her. Blue Bell became nervous.

"What's wrong? Y-You don't want... candy, do you?" asked Blue Bell nervously.

Deluge hesitated for a moment. Then she shook her head. She hasn't gotten Blue Bell's candy in a while. The constant fighting has kept her mind off of it.

"No candy. Medicine, please."

Blue Bell nodded, took out a small case, and gave Deluge the medicine in her palm. This is the most important thing she *has* to keep consuming.

Without consuming this medicine every now and then, she'll physically be unable to maintain her Magical Girl form.

In short, no medicine, no Princess Deluge.

There was no need to take a large amount of medicine unless she was doing for battle.

The medicine isn't infinite, so she should take as little as possible. Deluge took a closer look at the pill case.

She'd received much more than her usual amount back during her Pure Elements days. She took most of them from when she raided the R&D Division.

Deluge wondered why she used so many of those medicines freely back then. Even recently during her search for Sachiko.

Certainly, they were good times to use them, but she should've been more careful. Sometimes, she felt like she was using more than what's necessary.

Who's even in charge nowadays?

Most of her instructions have always come indirectly nowadays. Is the person even real? Is it one person, or multiple people?

How did they get so much information? They never appeared in front of Deluge in person either.

Deluge looked at Dark Cutie.

Dark Cutie looked back at Deluge.

"Five minutes. We break for five minutes."

Dark Cutie nodded. She took out her Magical Phone, and turned it on. An Anime OST began playing.

Cutie Healer Galaxy OST.

"Whew, we finally get a break huh?" said Glassianne, stretching her arms upwards.

Blue Bell exhaled deeply. Deluge leaned on a nearby wall, opposite Dark Cutie.

She took a moment to consider her thoughts.

She used to be happy that she's fighting the Osk Faction. She was going to get her revenge. Recently, she'd been happy to be fighting the Puck Faction as well.

Armor Arlie, Blade Brenda, Cannon Catherine. These were the three Magical Girls that were imprisoned by the Puck Faction.

Deluge wanted to rescue them. She can't believe that they'd be taken away like that.

She felt guilty for it.

A memory came to mind, a series of memories actually, just after breaking Arlie out of the research facility.

She tried to recreate the same type of training that the Pure Elements had. Finding a building to hide out in, on an underground cellar.

There, she tried to do the same simulated fights that the Pure Elements always did from before.

Except it didn't work like that. The building they were in collapsed as a result of their training fight.

When they got out of the rubble, Arlie seemed to stagger around a bit, dumbfounded.

Deluge remembered actually laughing at how silly the whole thing was. Of course the building shouldn't be able to take a Magical Girl's training, dummy!

It reminded her of happier times.

One time, Armor Arlie was impatient, wanting to eat. Deluge told her, "Magical Girls don't need to eat." But Arlie was insistent.

So they tried to eat as best as they could. Deluge preferred Consommé Soup herself.

Deluge looked up at the sky.

She remembered the Pure Elements. How did things go wrong from there? Look at where she is now.

She attacked the Research and Development Division.

She, or at least her team, fought Snow White.

She kidnapped Shadow Gale.

She killed the Policeman Magical Girl.

She killed many Card Soldier Magical Girls too.

There was no turning back from this. She can't just decide to stop anymore. That would make everything meaningless. It's too late for her.

Where does she go from here? Only old memories gave her a semblance of some type of life.

Can she restart herself? Rebuild? After all this? Start over? She's not going to throw out her old memories away.

She looked away from the sky. Dark Cutie was right in front of her. 30 cm in front of her.

Due to shock, Deluge withdrew her head, and hit the back of her head against the wall, groaning slightly.

"Oh. You okay?" asked Dark Cutie.

"Yeah, don't worry about it," said Deluge.

Dark Cutie turned towards Glassianne and Blue Bell.

"Five minutes are over."

Glassianne booed, Blue Bell exhaled again. Both got up from the rooftop ground.

Deluge wondered what her next steps are. She thought calmly about the present situation. Pfle was clearly using Deluge as best as she can.

It was a tug-of-war, even though for now they're on the same side.

Once Deluge recaptures Shadow Gale, she'll gain the upper hand again. If Pfle gets her hands on Shadow Gale first, she can expose Deluge, and most likely Dark Cutie's group will side with Pfle instead.

Pfle would do that in a heartbeat. No conscience would be lost on her end.

But Deluge can also play the power game. Once she gets Armor Arlie and the other Man-Made Magical Girls back, she can easily outpower Pfle's plans, recapture Shadow Gale, and once again gain control over Pfle.

She's not going to get outplayed that easily.

In order to use Pfle, Shadow Gale would have to be Deluge's shield.

Deluge knew what kind of person Pfle was. She wouldn't dare hurt Deluge if it meant Deluge hurting Shadow Gale.

With Pfle under her command, she can use Pfle, who was allied with the Osk Faction, to destroy the Osk Faction from the inside.

To do that, she had to defeat the Puck Faction.

Let's recap.

Attack the Puck Faction. Defeat them.

Recapture Shadow Gale.

Rescue Armor Arlie, Blade Brenda, and Cannon Catherine.

Defeat the Osk Faction.

This was Deluge's plan. She's playing it dangerously, but this was her gameplan.

"Let's go," said Deluge.

The demons were called, and the Magical Girls were carried away by their black winged forms.

☆ Shadow Gale

The tunnels in the ruins were fully controlled by the Puck Faction.

There was the smell of blood, iron, and fire. Magical Girls were fighting and being injured.

But Shadow Gale kept walking ahead.

There were Magical Girls all around her, but if she kept going further, amidst all the chaos, there was a vague glimmer of hope.

Shadow Gale kept walking forward happily.

She was wrapped in total bliss. If she kept walking forward, she would get to see Puk Puck again. Shadow Gale missed Puk Puck. She wanted to see her face again.

As she got closer to her, she saw that every other Magical Girl felt the same way as she did. Whether they're Homunculi or Magical Girls, they were all smiling so happily at the sight of Puk Puck.

Shadow Gale felt like she was content with everything. She knew everyone around her thought of the same thing.

Lady Puck...

...Ah... Lady Puck...

You're so beautiful

You're so cute

You're so pretty

I can do anything for you

She heard the voices of the Magical Girls near Puk Puck.

“Lady Puck... you’re perfect in every way.”

“Lady Puck! We love you so much!”

“Lady Puck, please make me more useful to you!”

Shadow Gale began to shake in complete happiness at hearing the truth in those words. Tears of joy began streaming down her face.

Puk Puck walked to each injured Magical Girl. She crouched down to them and touched them.

“Does it hurt?” asked Puk Puck.

The injured Magical Girls would all look at her, before smiling, and nodding.

“I’m really sorry. I don’t want anyone to get killed. Here, I’ll have someone patch you up, okay?” said Puk Puck.

Various healing Magical Girls went to work, carrying the injured away as they said thank you.

In the hallways of the ruins, Magical Girls decorated the walls with paintings, the floors with flowers, and sprayed perfume everywhere. It was part of the baggage being packed to move in here.

Just like home.

Puk Puck walked back. The nursing Magical Girls all looked towards her and smiled, before continuing their work again after she left.

Dancers and clown Magical Girls all danced near Puk Puck as well.

Everything was for Puk Puck. The world was for Puk Puck. Shadow Gale knew this as fact.

There are people who still don't know about this, and that would make Puk Puck sad. However, wherever Puk Puck went, people understood.

Adversaries attacked endlessly. Magical Girls were against Puk Puck. Puk Puck disliked fighting, but she had no choice.

After they were defeated, Puk Puck would come to them, and they would understand the truth.

Puk Puck changes people.

Shadow Gale used to be like them. She used to be a selfish Magical Girl who only thought about her own priorities.

She used to use her magic for things that were worthless. Serving someone who was nothing but selfish.

She used to be afraid of meeting Puk Puck. However, after meeting her, she's felt nothing but happiness.

Thank you for meeting me, Puk Puck

She thought about that every day.

She followed Puk Puck closely behind. Every T-junction, every crossroad, Puk Puck knew this place like the back of her hand.

And there, they reached the biggest part of the room.

The ceiling was over 20 meters, and the room was largely circular in its shape.

Puk Puck opened her arms wide open.

"TA-DAAAAA!!! Well? Whaddya guys think?"

It was... huge.

Shadow Gale couldn't process it properly. Puk Puck walked closer to it, and Shadow Gale followed.

The closer she got, the more nonsensical this *thing* would become.

It seemed to be made of stone minerals, but then it seemed to be made of ivy vines.

It seemed to have a hard shape, but then it seemed blurry.

It seemed to be a square, but then it became a circle.

It seemed to be a circle, but then it became a triangle.

It was supported by four legs that shouldn't be able to support it.

The more Shadow Gale tried to understand it, the more she got a headache, and the more she wanted to look away.

She would've ran away scared if it weren't for Puk Puck being at her side.

Puk Puck gently touched the *thing* .

"My mentor gifted this to all of us..." she said softly.

When she touched the *thing* , it seemed like it shouldn't be touchable, but Puk Puck touched it anyway.

"I feel like my mentor gave this to us as a panic button. I feel like this should be used when you really think something bad's gonna happen. Don't you think so, guys?" asked Puk Puck.

Shadow Gale nodded immediately.

What Puk Puck says is correct. Shadow Gale didn't understand it, but she felt like it was correct. She trusts Puk Puck, and the other Magical

Girls around her do too.

“Recently, the Land of Magic hasn’t become what it used to be. With all the chaos and destruction that’s happened in recent years, it feels as if the magical energy that the Land of Magic has is being strained, and I don’t know what’ll happen if more chaotic things happen. That makes me sad.”

Shadow Gale grieved. If Puk Puck was sad, Shadow Gale was sad too.

Puk Puck knocked on the device’s legs, producing a sound that couldn’t be described.

“But that’s why this thing’s here! If we remodel this device, we can create enough magical energy to save the Land of Magic! We just need all the Magical Girls to work together! Don’t worry, you’ll all be safe during the process! All it’s going to do is create more magical energy! Normally, this thing collects magical energy from the surroundings of the world, all you’re doing is just speeding up the process, that’s all!”

Shadow Gale was comforted by Puk Puck’s words.

Puk Puck looked at the faces of every Magical Girl around her. She walked off, and Shadow Gale was relieved that she can leave the *thing* behind, at least for now.

“My mentor was a smart and good person. They didn’t want anyone bad to use the device. So what they did was create a seal. It’s not a simple barrier, either. It’s a seal that should be unbreakable unless everyone works together. A sense of unity was required to break it, because my mentor believed that when the time is required, and all the Magical Girls had to work together, only then would the device be modified. That’s why I’ve collected the best of the best Magical Girls, with all your unique skills, in order to break the seal. That’s gonna be your job okay? Do your best, okay?”

Puk Puck walked over to Shadow Gale and held out her hands, and naturally, Shadow Gale reached out to grab Puk Puck’s hands first.

The warmth of Puk Puck's hands lighted the courage in Shadow Gale's heart.

"I know you can do it!" said Shadow Gale.

"Yeah!"

"We can do it!"

"Let's do our best!"

"For you, Lady Puck"

"I'll do it all for you, Lady Puck!" said Shadow Gale.

Puk Puck smiled, and they all smiled back. Puk Puck walked away, and the Magical Girls happily smiled with each other.

Everyone was happy. Everyone was so happy.

The feeling of bliss washed over Shadow Gale, so much that she let out a loud laugh. She's never felt this happy before in her life, and she didn't want it to go away.

Chapter 4: Queen's Playground

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

There were two large mountains lined up side by side. On the valley that made up those two mountains was the entrance to the ruins.

A large gate blocked the path.

All of the tunnels inside were controlled by the Puck Faction now. No, it's more than that. The Puck Faction didn't just control it. They'll be protecting its defenses as well now.

Hammer was watching from a distance. A distance of over 10 kilometers, give or take. She was positioned above a hilltop, safely away from any possible prying eyes.

From here, Hammer can see a lot of things surrounding the entrance. The empty wastes that stretched out as far as her eye can see.

Considering the enemy's magic, that might not be ideal, but the benefit of battlefield knowledge outweighed that.

Hammer gave some orders to the Diamonds Shufflin. Lethe was also there, as strong as ever, sitting on her vinyl chair inside a tent in the wastes.

A nobleman's chair in a commoner's tent in an arid wasteland almost seems comical if you just happened to see it.

But with Lethe's air of majesty, she somehow made the whole look seem very natural.

The Shufflins were busy handling several requests at once, with Spades Shufflins guarding Lethe's tent's entrance.

Various Magical Girls were currently gathered around the tents. These are Magical Girls that normally wouldn't even be working together.

Now they're sharing business cards and shaking hands.

Hammer had used her magic to contact almost everyone that she ever knew beforehand who she thinks she can help.

Hammer didn't even need to try and find these people, she simply broadcasted them as much as she can, and gave a meeting spot. The ones sympathetic to Osk Faction's cause then showed up.

Despite most of Osk Faction's recent reputation coming from Grim Heart, Lethe has done her best to provide a sense of damage control.

Firstly, Lethe offered weapons, expenses, and research results that the Osk Faction personally owns to these Magical Girls and the groups they worked for, so that's already incentive enough.

Secondly, Lethe emphasized that this doesn't mean the Magical Girls will be working underneath the Osk Faction. Nor does it mean the Magical Girls will be working for the sake of the Osk Faction's benefit.

Instead, Lethe is offering her hand as an alliance. Standing on equal grounds, to unite against a common enemy.

Thirdly, there is another section of Magical Girls who aren't joining up due to their opinions of the Osk Faction, but rather due to their negative opinions of the Puck Faction. Those people simply don't want the Puck Faction to gain power.

Hammer and Lethe were prepared to go as far as they need to accomplish their objectives. Hopefully the other Magical Girls feel the same.

For now, all that Lethe can hope for is their unity against a Sage. The promises that they made will have to be dealt with once all this is over.

Lethe went outside, under the heat of the sun. Still shaded, however, by the Diamonds Shufflins that waved large fans at her from both sides.

She turned her eyes to the large gate blocking the entrance to the ruins.

This gate's purpose is to keep out intruders. It's so far done a great job, standing a 100 meters tall and remaining nearly indestructible.

As a testament to its height, there were about 3 boulders in front of the gate, tall enough to conceal a very large person.

In comparison, they were like pebbles to that gate.

The only way the Puck Faction even got in wasn't through a weakness in the gate itself, but the gatekeeper.

"The preparations are ready, hm?"

"Yes. As far as our part goes, at least. We did all we can."

Over three hours has passed since the ruins were attacked by the Puck Faction. Three hours seems long, but luckily the Puck Faction hasn't activated the device yet.

In that amount of time, they had gathered an attacking force that rivals the enemy before them.

"Good. Let's open the gate, hm?"

"Understood."

Since the ruins' defenses are owned by the Osk Faction, they have another way in. Of course, the gate is operable from the inside, but the Osk Faction also has a way to control the gate from the outside.

Hammer had her hands on a microphone. Lethe had her hands on opera glasses. She looked through them, watching as the gate opened slowly.

The vibrations could be felt almost everywhere, even from where Hammer's standing.

Hammer didn't really know what to expect. Perhaps a warm welcoming party filled with clapping and happy Magical Girls, thanks to Puk Puk.

But when the gate opened, there seemed to be a few Magical Girls coming outside of the gate.

Hammer counted about 10.

She wasn't sure what to make of it. They seemed normal, but they're probably enemies, given what's transpired.

“They’re illusions,” said Lethe.

“Come again?”

“Magical illusions. They’re not real. You can check. Throw a stone or something, hm?”

Hammer nodded.

Lethe should know any kind of magical illusions or traps. The opera glasses weren’t normal opera glasses. It was a Magical Item from the Land of Magic. Rather, it was a special one from Osk’s very own vaults.

“Understood. Clubs, you’re up. Hit them in the back just in case. Spades, stand your ground.”

The Shufflin squad sent towards the gate were all being commanded by Hammer, whose magic allows her to communicate and coordinate instantly, with no time lag.

The Clubs moved into position behind the illusionary Magical Girls.

Clubs Shufflin have extraordinary senses compared to a normal Magical Girl. That included hearing. This way, they can perceive each other, even when they’re being as stealthy as possible.

They took out their maces, shaped like clubs, and hit each illusionary Magical Girl in the back, each one dissolving, confirming Lethe’s theory.

“Proceed forward. Spades, I want higher numbers guarding the flanks, with the lower numbers supporting from behind.”

“Jack, King, Queen, you’re in charge of the left, front, and right flanks respectively.”

“Diamonds Shuffles, keep watch outside. Ensure no one gets in.”

“Alright, everyone move out.”

All of these orders were executed at once by the Shuffles.

Shuffles are still Magical Girls, even at their lowest number. They’re still capable of fighting, so Diamonds, while being fairly weak in their

durability and fighting skills, can still hold up, as long as their opponents aren't combat masters.

Suddenly, a large black group of clouds loomed across the sky. Lightning then struck the ground where the Diamond Shufflins were, scattering them and creating a large crackling noise.

Not only that, but steams of water and what seemed to be a face made out of wind blew a large gust that completely scattered the Heart Shufflins inside back outside.

"Hm, this doesn't seem like the work of any newbie Magical Girls."

"A surprise attack, but we made it through. Looks like it's an expertly crafted defense too. My guess is the mercenaries."

"The Puck Faction has mercenaries too, hm?"

"They needed combat veterans on the go. There were also rumors circulating around that once you're hired by Puk Puck, you won't want to switch your job, even for a higher pay. I'm assuming that some mercenaries took that as a challenge."

"But we also have mercenaries of our own, hm?"

"We do."

"Can they match to what Puck has, hm?"

"Absolutely. If they can't, we've provided some of them with Shufflins of our own. Since we have Shufflin 2, they've got things such as the Prototype Shufflin, Desert Warfare Shufflin, and we've thrown in Training Shufflins too."

"Isn't that bad if we're splitting our armies that way, hm?"

"On the contrary, it lets multiple people and generals focus their own armies. I can focus on my own squad of Shufflins, rather than command a super large army. I think this can work."

The Shufflins in the distance were regaining their composure.

“Sending only Shufflins will be pointless. Puk Puck has a variety of Magical Girls, fighting with their own Magical Skills. We need to send our own in, hm?”

“Agreed. But we have to make sure we can cover our escape and not get caught when we’re there. How much time do we have left? The longer we wait the more-”

“Where’s Pfle?”

“Huh?”

“I had assumed the Human Resources Division would provide us extra troops, hm?”

“They will. It takes time to process that and send a whole squadron to us. We have to check if they’ve been affected by Puk Puck’s magic too.”

“I see… As much pull as our faction may have, Human Resources does a better job at providing us Magical Girls. Let’s hope she pulls through, hm?”

“Agreed.”

Hammer had been relying a lot on Shufflins. Shufflins were good soldiers, but they lack range, and some of these enemies have powers that they don’t even know of. It’d be risky and foolish to send in Shufflins all by themselves.

Hammer spoke into her microphone.

“What’s your plan, hm?”

“Retreating. For now.”

“I agree with retreating, but not with routing. Tell them not to face their backs to the enemy, don’t run back here, and be aware of any pursuers, hm?”

“Understood.”

The Spades were the ones that were actively avoiding the lightning strikes and beams being fired from somewhere in the ruins.

Together, they helped the Diamonds and Hearts back on their feet.

Spades are the elite combatant units of the Shufflin army. From 2 all the way to Ace, they are better at fighting than an average Magical Girl.

The battlefield should be restricted to the ruins, but with the thunder magic, Hammer considered the possibility that the Puck Faction can take the battlefield here.

Hammer could see an ambush group of actual Magical Girls attempting to attack the Shufflin group, but the Spades did their work covering the flanks.

Their speed with the spears managed to stop the attackers, and even beat them down before they could do any damage.

The Shufflins retreated past the gate as more Puck reinforcements began to show up, but the Shufflins were already too far for them to venture further.

“A retreat is not admitting defeat. We’ve won this first battle, hm?”

“Agreed. We know about their early defenses. We can plan ahead next time.”

“I’m glad you share my sentiments, hm.”

“Of course Lady Lethe, this is all thanks to your work as leader, after all.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere.”

“...Yes, ma’am.”

Before the next strike, there were several things that needed to be planned out.

Instructions to subordinates, reorganization of troops, preparations, meetings with various collaborators.

Hammer gathered the list of collaborators loyal to the cause, looking for each Magical Girl within the camp.

"Having a little trouble finding all of them, hang on," said Hammer occasionally as she passed by Lethe.

Hammer saw a Magical Girl and a Mage arguing nearby.

"Stop ordering me around already!"

"I'm not *ordering* you, I'm *asking* you!"

"But I told you everything I know! I need to see someone important!"

"That can wait, just come along already!"

Hammer sighed. She didn't really want to deal with these kinds of things right now, but cooperation is key to survival.

"Hey, both of you, quit it! We're trying to cooperate here, okay?" said Hammer.

The Mage adjusted her glasses, and the Magical Girl scoffed. The Mage nodded at Hammer, "Thanks," she said.

Hammer sighed, and talked to the Mage, "Sorry, everything's just been a mess recently. You're from the Examination Division right? You should talk to my boss. I'm sure she's happy to have your cooperation."

The Magical Girl nearby tilted her head.

"Cooperation? Who's cooperating?" asked the Magical Girl.

"You are. The Puck Faction is illegally occupying the ruins. They're breaking the law, so we need your help," said Hammer.

"Wait, *that's* what we're doing?" asked the Magical Girl.

"Yes. And as soon as we finish that, I'm gonna have my hands busy with investigations, so the sooner we get this done, the better," said the Mage, walking away, now only her robe was visible.

The Magical Girl grumbled and lowered her hoodie.

Before she did that, Hammer could see her face. Around her nose and her cheeks were freckles.

Freckles? That was very rare among Magical Girl forms. But Hammer remembered seeing freckles twice.

She rubbed her temples, Hammer tried to remember this Magical Girl.

Ah, now she remembered. This was a Puck Faction Magical Girl. Why was someone from the Puck Faction in here?

This Magical Girl was the one Magical Girl who could tell believable lies. Because of her, Hammer had to go to the trouble of making earplugs for all her Shufflins.

When Pfle said she had her sources earlier, did she mean this girl? More than that, why is a Puck Faction Magical Girl together with the Examination Division?

If Pfle's source was her, shouldn't she be with a Human Resources staff member?

Hammer rubbed her temples again, confused. She walked away from the two.

Hammer turned on her microphone. She set the target to the Liar Magical Girl. She was going to confirm if it's really the same Magical Girl.

In a whisper to the microphone, Hammer said, "Hey, idiot"

"WHO SAID THAT!? WHO'S CALLING ME AN IDIOT, HUH!? IDIOT!!!" shouted the Hoodie Magical Girl.

The Mage with glasses looked at the Magical Girl with a confused facial expression.

"What are you shouting for? If you don't wanna be called an idiot, don't act like one."

Hammer turned on the microphone again, and whispered, "You're the idiot, idiot."

The Hoodie Magical Girl began to flail her arms and stomp on the ground, shouting and screaming.

The Mage tried to calm her down. “Hey! Quiet down already! Hey! Who are you trying to talk to!?”

Well, that confirms it. That’s the same Magical Girl. She seems rather destructive and rash to be a proper spy to the Puck Faction, but who knows if that’s true.

Hammer began to talk to the Ace of Clubs, “Monitor the Hoodie Magical Girl. See if she does anything suspicious.”

Hammer still had a job to do. She can’t keep Lethe waiting. She continued her search. She doesn’t really know if the Examination Division Mage would talk to Lethe, so Hammer decided on finding another Division member.

That’s when she saw a familiar looking person.

“Ah! Miss Yoshioka!”

“Oh my, Hammer, was it?”

“Correct. I’m glad you arrived here.”

“Well, things are pretty lively it seems.”

“That they are. Is Lady Ratsumu here?”

“Ah, I didn’t bring Ratsumu today.”

‘Bring’. She used bring. That’s a rather strange word to use. A bit rude and informal, as if she was an object.

Then again, it could just be a way to indicate that these two were familiar with each other, but...

“Is that so? Is she busy?” asked Hammer.

“Ah, don’t worry about it. That woman, with the way she can be. It’s going to be rather hard guarding her against stray bullets or possible assassination attempts in the middle of this rabble. Poor thing,” said Yoshioka.

There again. ‘That woman’. ‘Poor thing’.

Rather odd to use those words to describe a Sage. Then again, the Caspar Faction is known to be the most laid back faction, so maybe that's just how they act around each other.

It still made Hammer a bit nervous.

"You look like you're busy, though, aren't you, Hammer?" asked Yoshioka directly.

Hammer laughed nervously and nodded. She wanted to get away as soon as possible. Perhaps it's not a good idea to bring Yoshioka to Lethe for now.

Yoshioka adjusted her glasses and looked towards the large gate in the valley, while Hammer continued on her way.

Why isn't there anyone normal to talk to?

☆ Puk Puck

The Osk Faction moved in fast. Certainly their leaders were efficient and was able to coordinate together far better than any other faction.

If Puck befriended them, they could help Puk Puck out tremendously.

But Puk Puck also has to rely on her own Faction, and herself. She had to organize things for her friends, and ensure their safety.

Everything Puk Puck did was for the sake of her friends and the people she wanted to befriend.

As far as the Magical Girls around her have reported, the situation doesn't sound very good for Puk Puck right now.

Everyone is against the Puck Faction. Everyone is attempting to oppose her. Not only that, but Puk Puck also lost people too.

All of these things made Puk Puck sad. She was about to cry, but she didn't want her friends to see her in that kind of state.

She retreated to her room, she needed something soft to pour everything towards.

A large koala plushie. Puk Puck hugged the plushie, and began to cry softly into it. Not loudly enough that anyone outside could hear, but she had to let the sadness all out.

Being turned against by the whole world, and losing your friends at the same time, those were things that would make anyone sad.

As a Sage, Puk Puck must be an example to her friends, and put on a cheerful and happy expression all around.

She can't be judged by others as a crybaby, even though Puk Puck herself knew that she wasn't always perfect herself.

Flaws and weaknesses can make a dent in friendship, and if Puk Puck couldn't make anymore friends, then it's not worth it.

Even though the koala plushie is just that. A plushie. Puk Puck imagined that it was someone warmly embracing her, being hugged, being comforted, having someone tell her that everything's going to be okay.

She calmed down, wiping away her own tears. She gently released the koala, and laid down on her carpet.

The carpet, the wallpaper, the ceiling, the mountains of plush toys, the cute little vase decoration, a white lily sticking out of it.

All of them were gifts from her friends, brought here from Puck Manor. It's as if she was still back home again, at a peaceful time.

Puk Puck thanked everyone, she smiled happily at having friends who cared.

She got up, making sure her face had no tearstains and looked prim and proper. Then, she spoke to the Magical Girl whose room was just next door.

“Snow? You there?”

“Yeah! What's up?”

“Our friends at the entrance in the valley are in trouble. There was a fight earlier on. Whaddya think we should do?”

"Well, are there any casualties? We should move the survivors back, retreat to the entrance of the ruins inside the gate!"

It seems that Snow White had already thought of this plan beforehand, since there was no delay in her response. Could she have already formulated a way to use the environment while they were entering the ruins?

Puk Puck wasn't good at battle plans, since she didn't enjoy fighting. That's why she brought in Snow White to help, so Puk Puck would trust what Snow had to offer.

She had to make her an active member, after all.

Still, there were some questions in mind.

"Um, sorry about this, Snow"

"It's okay! Whatcha apologizing for?"

"Just a few questions, really. Like, why are we retreating from the valley entrance?"

"Well, I gotta say, your first plan's fine. The valley entrance is huge, yeah. We can have Magical Girls with big magical abilities hit troops far more easily. But if they break through that defense through sheer numbers, we're gonna be hard pressed to retreat, and we won't be able to hold the fort in the strategically more easier place to hold it in."

"Hm? Explain, please. Aren't we just giving the valley entrance over to the enemy."

"The most important thing about a first line of defense is where you put it. Not in the furthest place from where you wanna defend, but in the easiest place to defend. It doesn't matter if they get the valley entrance, as long as they don't push through to the device, right?"

"...Right, and the ruins entrance is good because..."

"It's narrower! This forces the enemy to move ahead in a straight line. There's not much maneuvering space, and any large magical effects will most likely hit them more than us. We know the layout, right? We can set

up elite Magical Girls to guard the narrow pass, then we can ambush them!"

"Ah, an ambush, I see!"

"Yep, that way, they'll lose a lot more casualties pushing in. If they retreat, we can get even more of them! It's hard to maneuver in tight spaces, and for attackers, they're at a disadvantage. They have to send almost everyone in, not knowing what to expect. Defenders like us, we can set up Magical Girls suited for close quarters combat in the narrow passages, and leave Magical Girls with other roles later on! That's the key to a solid defense."

Snow White thought further.

"Oh, the enemies are Shufflins right? Shufflins have scouts, so it's more likely they'll send them in first. If we play our cards and destroy the scouts with huge magic, we're just letting them win, because they now have information. We should let them scout ahead, then when the real army comes, that's the one we'll strike."

"But, if we let them do that, what if they'll get deeper into the ruins! What if the fighting destroys the device?"

"That won't happen."

"Why not?"

"Because the other side doesn't *want* to destroy the device. They want to recover it from us. In fact, the deeper they fight in the ruins, the less destructive magic they'll try to use, so we'll be at an advantage!"

Puk Puck realized Snow White's logic. It was a tactic that used the ruins themselves against the enemy, making sure the enemy has no advantage or room to run.

Puk Puck looked up at Snow White. Snow White's eyes seemed to be full of pride, like she wanted to show off how useful she is to Puk Puck.

Puk Puck agreed to that, and stretched out her right hand. Happily, Snow White crouched down, and Puk Puck stroked her head.

☆ Blue Bell Candy

Following Deluge this time, Blue Bell found herself in some kind of wasteland. She drove the car there herself.

Now she's in what seems to be a camp, with tents everywhere.

Glassianne wasn't with them. She didn't need to be, thanks to her power. Far up ahead, there seems to be some kind of fighting going on between card soldiers.

Deluge and Dark Cutie weren't with her at the moment.

The sun is getting hotter and hotter. The card soldiers fighting at the large gate charged inside the gate. Blue Bell only watched from a distance.

Blue Bell didn't feel like she was very helpful. Not at all. She was stressed out at not being supportive.

She wanted to be supportive to Deluge. She'd tried so hard to be that person to her, but as of late, Deluge has been acting rashly, and now they're here.

Blue Bell will still stick around. Blue Bell can't just abandon Deluge, either.

Blue Bell knows that Deluge isn't a stupid person. She's well-adjusted and smart. Blue Bell wanted that Deluge back.

Lately, Deluge had stopped taking Blue Bell's candies. At the very least, that means she's learned to calm herself down without them, which is a good thing.

Now it seems Blue Bell's the one that's being stressed out. She wanted to eat the candies herself, calm herself down.

She didn't just want to be useful to Deluge, she wanted to be useful to everyone. Honestly, Blue Bell didn't know what she could do to help out around here.

“Troubling, isn’t it? The fighting up ahead?”

She heard a voice, it came from beside her. A girl in a wheelchair. Blue Bell had been a bit afraid of her before, but in her current state, anyone to talk to would be great.

“Ah, I didn’t realize that you came by, Pfle... O-Or, Madame Pfle? I... Uh...”

“Ahaha, don’t stress yourself over titles. Pfle is fine.”

“Right... It’s just, you’re high up in a Division, so... I just assumed...”

“It’s fine, Blue Bell.”

“I see... Well, are things going okay where you are?”

“It’s a tightrope balancing act, and I’m walking the tightrope.”

“I see. I didn’t expect you to come all the way here.”

“Of course I would. I’d have to supervise the upcoming battle myself. Coming here where everyone gathers is the only way I can do that.”

“That makes sense. Yeah...”

“Why don’t we take a look at the battle happening out there, shall we? Tell me, what do you see?”

Blue Bell looked at the card soldiers. They were retreating from the gate, as it began to close up once more.

The cards with spears were guarding the other cards behind them.

“It’s a retreat, right?” asked Blue Bell.

“Good. What about the other side?”

“I can’t see them.”

“Correct. Because they’re still in the ruins. The Shufflins have taken down Puck’s Magical Girls, as the Spades are excellent fighters.”

“They have? But why are they retreating?”

“Because victory isn’t as simple as winning one battle. Retreat is not a defeat. The Puck Faction showed their hand, now we know what their

opening defenses are. They'll have to regroup, or they will face losses the next time we strike. But the Puck Faction isn't foolish. Notice how none of them are chasing down the Shufflins?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you find that strange?"

"How so?"

"In a normal fight, routing usually means that you've won a battle, and the Puck Faction has won the battle, but look. None of them are capitalizing on the Shufflins retreating. No Magical Girl wants to take a chance to chase down the Shufflins. I can't even tell who the enemy commanders are, because they aren't giving any direct orders."

"I... I'm not following."

"They're in synch with orders given before the battle. Normally that doesn't happen in most cases. Even in actual battles. You'd need a commander to keep them in check. These Magical Girls are individuals with their own personalities, but it seems like they've all merged into one, working together towards a common goal."

"Doesn't that just mean they're loyal to their leader?"

"Precisely. Far too loyal. No one's breaking rank at all. It's rather scary, but not even their personal motivations outrank their loyalty to their leader. I've no doubt this is due to the leader's magic."

"How can you tell?"

"Their actions in battle. They have different ways to fight, their personalities are all different, but after the battle, they merge together. They're still themselves, but they're loyal to their leader first and foremost. I can tell because I can read people by their behaviors. This isn't a detailed read, just broad strokes, but that's what I usually do."

Pfle turned her wheelchair towards Blue Bell. "But that's not why I'm here. I'm looking for Glassianne."

"Huh, oh... She's resting in one of the tents."

"Oh, she's not here? Shame. Her powers are useful at times like these. She can get up close without hurting herself. Very well then, apologies for bothering you," said Pfle as she turned around in her wheelchair and moved away.

Pfle had only moved around two meters before she turned around again.

"Ah, that reminds me. How is Deluge?" asked Pfle.

"She's doing okay."

"With the Shufflins around here. Will she be fine?"

"She... I think. She's calmed down a lot more now."

"...With your candy?"

"No. No, she hasn't been taking any candies lately."

Pfle nodded, then she turned around once more and rolled away. Blue Bell simply watched Pfle's back as she left.

Pfle's pretty strange, thought Blue Bell.

Blue Bell looked around. Deluge and Dark Cutie still haven't returned yet. Blue Bell sighed, and began walking over to find an empty tent.

She wanted to just eat her candies, relax, close her eyes, and rest for a long time. She can't handle the stress that's building up.

She wanted to be supportive to everyone, but she's done nothing to help Deluge, Pfle, Dark Cutie, or anyone in camp so far.

If she's not useful towards anything, it felt like she would just disappear into nothingness. What was the point, then?

As she walked around, a hand grabbed onto her.

The hand's grip was hard. Blue Bell couldn't react fast enough, another hand gripped her neck, as it pulled her towards a tent.

Blue Bell's body was thrown to the ground, and Blue Bell wanted to scream, but a hand clasped her mouth shut. Her screams were muffled.

Before she knew it, the hands began to feed her something. Round orb-shaped objects.

Forced into her mouth. Upon contact with her tongue, they melted instantly in her mouth. More and more of them were being force-fed to Blue Bell.

Blue Bell realized what these were. These were her candies. She tried to spit them out, but the hand kept forcing them down her throat.

The candies all melted in Blue Bell's mouth.

Blue Bell remembered that she wasn't Blue Bell.

☆ Princess Deluge

When Deluge saw staff members from the Examination Division, she didn't try to hide her face.

Even though she knew she'd probably be arrested, Pfle had assured them that Deluge won't cause any trouble.

Deluge didn't delude herself into thinking she was quiet. People probably knew it was her who killed the Shufflins in the city.

If Deluge was going to have problems here, she'll have to run again once more.

Even though the Examination Division will hold off on her, Deluge had agreed that it's best to stay away from most people at this time. So she usually spent most of her time inside her tent.

Quake, Tempest, Inferno, Cherry, they were still fresh on her minds, even now. Yet, she remembered all of their deaths vividly.

How come they had to die? It was all due to their obligations as a Magical Girl. That was all she thought of as she killed all those Shufflin.

Now, the Shufflins are partners.

Deluge thought about the future, as long as she remembers the future and her plans, this would be okay, for now.

“I heard from the boss,” said a voice.

The voice came from behind her. On the tent wall, a dark Magical Girl in the shadows.

Their tent looked rather age-old, and a bit musty. The Magical Girl was holding her knees, she looked rather silly sitting like that.

“The Mage from the Examination Division has the Puck Faction’s Magical Girl with her.”

Deluge remembered the incident well. Glassianne was trying hard to scout inside Puk Puck’s manor, looking for the whereabouts of Shadow Gale.

In the middle of that, an Examination Division Mage picked up an escapee. Or rather, it was one of Puk Puck’s own Magical Girls.

Since the Magical Girl had Snow White’s bag, Deluge decided to protect her for now.

“...And? What about it?” asked Deluge.

“I recognize her. From the amusement park. The one with the magic to make you believe her unconditionally. I killed her friend. I don’t think that’s just a friend to her... They seemed far too close to be simple friends.”

Deluge raised her eyebrow. “What are you trying to say?”

Dark Cutie smiled, almost as if she was excited.

“She doesn’t know I’m here yet... But if she finds out I’m here... She might want to kill me.”

“You seem happy about it.”

“...A little bit, yeah.”

“I don’t get it. You *want* to be killed?”

Dark Cutie shook her head. She looked at Deluge.

“That’s not it. I’m just... I’m thinking of what a protagonist would do. Would she team up with the villain to stop a bigger villain, or would she

seek vengeance once she finds out the villain is here? What's more suitable for a main character? If it's the latter, a proper villain would prefer death. Of course, perhaps I could just showcase a difference in our strength, then the hero will have to train harder and realize that vengeance isn't the only way, that would also make for a wonderful hero. Then, she'll want a rematch, now much stronger than I am... That would be a satisfying end, too... What should I do?"

Dark Cutie started out talking to Deluge, but she started to mumble off and talk while staring at the floor.

Was she talking to Deluge? Was she talking to someone else? Was she talking to herself?

Deluge ignored her. Glassianne, Mi-Chan, Pfle, all of them had told Deluge that this is what Dark Cutie tends to do sometimes. Most of them had always let her be like this.

"But is that Magical Girl a villain too? Or not... Seeking vengeance over the loss of family is often something that villains tend to do, but... anti-heroes exist. Avengers are often heroes as well, in some stories. Am I still the villain in this case? No, I still am the villain to her. Just because she seeks vengeance doesn't mean she's a villain, it depends on how she acts... Avengers are complicated. They often are the ones that are willing to commit the most extremes, but sometimes they're still heroes."

Again, Deluge simply tried to get some peaceful silence, despite hearing Dark Cutie talk over and over again.

Looks like Dark Cutie may have gone stir crazy.

"...Deluge is an Avenger, right? Is she a villain... or a hero? What is she capable of to seek vengeance on those who wronged her?"

Deluge widened her eyes, looking at Dark Cutie.

But Dark Cutie wasn't even talking to Deluge. She was still in her own thoughts, looking at the floor while hugging her knees.

Chapter 5: A Nostalgic Gift

☆ Pfle

The Mage with Glasses, Mana, walked up to her and raised her right hand. “Hey,” she said as she approached Pfle with a tired look on her face.

Annoyed eyebrows, a drooped shoulder.

“If you’re going to just leave out of the blue, you should’ve told me about it first. Especially before doing anything serious.”

“Well, sometimes I have subordinates to maintain and manage. Being in Human Resources does come with its own way of keeping you busy, you know. Speaking of busy, you were busy yourself, so I decided not to call you or tell you. Simple as that. Besides, I wouldn’t want you to be responsible for anything I might do.”

“Don’t give me bullshit. Back then, you haven’t even told me what you were trying to do. You came in to the Examination Division looking for help, right? You can’t just waltz out of it all of a sudden. Besides, right now the Osk Faction’s making a lot of unreasonable demands to everyone. It’s downright dogmatic. Why do you think I’m the only Examiner here?”

“That is curious. Why is that?”

“Because if I submit the reports and everything to an official of the Examination Division, the whole department’s gonna be on lockdown discussing the ‘proper course of action’ or the ‘standard operating procedure’. A case this big? By the time the Examination Division’s done talking about it, everything will be over already. Even so...”

Pfle moved her eyes over behind Mana. A Magical Girl with a Hoodie.

“Let’s just say my problems keep piling up,” said Mana.

“...So, I’m a problem to you, now? Uluru the troublemaker?” said the Magical Girl.

The Magical Girl puffed her cheeks out, Mana shook her head. Pfle recognized the voice of the Magical Girl. She first heard her on Mana’s Magical Phone, then Pfle heard the Magical Girl shouting and screaming outside.

Now she’s here.

It seems the two didn’t really get along that well.

“Please save Snow White, Pon!”

A sudden voice popped out of the Magical Girl named Uluru’s Magical Phone. She took it out of her pocket, and a stereoscopic image of a Cyber Fairy appeared before her.

Pfle was shocked. “Oh my,” she said, as a smile appeared on her face.

“I heard your voice on the phone but I assumed it was another Cyber Fairy. I never thought it could’ve been you again...”

“Long time no see, Pfle! It’s been a while, Pon!”

“It’s been a while indeed, Fal.”

Fal and Pfle talked in familiar terms. Certainly they’ve been through a lot together, but it’s been a while since they saw each other again.

Fal continued, however, with his current topic.

“But there’s something urgent, Pon! I detected Snow White’s vital signs, Pon!”

Pfle had done some research into Keek after the game. She had found out that she had indeed remodeled a Cyber Fairy using her magic.

Because of that, Fal was a complete upgrade than any other Cyber Fairy in existence. So, finding Magical Girls by their vital signs would be something he could do.

“Fal. Your current master is the Magical Girl Hunter?” asked Pfle.

“That’s right, Pon. But that’s beside the point, Pon.”

“Snow White asked me to get her stuff back in the manor... Then I was chased out. Only Snow White knew about it, too, so... I think... She’s the one who told them about my escape.”

“There’s no reason for Snow White to do that, Pon!”

“I know that! I don’t think there’s any reason for her to just rat on me like that, too... I mean, it was her plan.”

Fal summersaulted, scattering several colorful starches all across Uluru’s face. Uluru coughed as a result.

These were stereoscopic starches. They aren’t real, but Uluru coughed anyway.

“I’m both worried and relieved, Pon. I’m relieved because when I detected Snow White’s vitals, they were calm and composed, Pon. She’s under no stress. But that also worries me because that’s not right, Pon! Mentally and physically, that’s just wrong, Pon!”

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Mana.

“Well, it makes no sense that Snow White would be feeling like this. She’s feeling way too much pleasure and joy, Pon! Wasn’t she a prisoner? That’s impossible, then. It has to be some kind of magic.”

“Hey, listen to me! Like I said, I know it sounds off-”

Fal continued talking over Uluru.

“So I think she’s being manipulated by Puk Puck, Pon,” said Fal.

Everyone went silent. This time Mana replied.

“You should’ve known this when we were back in the manor right? Why didn’t you say so sooner?”

“I’m not going to say anything about Snow White until I understand the situation, Pon. I didn’t know who I could trust, Pon. Who’s the enemy, who’s my friend? Without a master, I’m not really any use. I’m just a Cyber Fairy, Pon. If I carelessly tell an enemy, then who knows what’ll happen, Pon.”

Mana bit her lip. She understood why Fal needed to know friend from foe, and certainly didn't blame the Cyber Fairy.

Pfle tilted her head. The atmosphere in this place is dry, even for a Magical Girl.

"I'm curious. I know Puk Puck's trying to activate this ancient device. How does Snow White's magic factor into all this?"

"Nothing that I know of, Pon."

"Then Snow White's not actually being used to help activate the device. Her duties lie elsewhere in the Puck Faction," said Pfle.

Mana nodded.

"I agree. If it's not for anything Puk Puck plans to achieve, then she's probably being used as the general of the army," replied Mana.

Pfle licked her mouth, moistening it in the dry air.

"So the Magical Girl Hunter is against us... She's a dangerous enemy, not one I'd underestimate. Since she's the Magical Girl Hunter, it makes sense that she'd be in charge of defense, laying out traps and ambushes. We shouldn't underestimate her."

"If we're really going up against Snow White, we need to know more information before we go in," said Mana.

"I've studied up some of her previous cases before. I could look them up again. For now, we need to work together to outmaneuver her."

Snow White, the Magical Girl Hunter, is a dangerous opponent. She's in her element, because she has everything that a hunter would ever need.

A hunting ground, some traps, and her prey. The next moves will have to be done carefully in order to not fall into her traps.

Fal nervously summersaulted. Despite his permanent smile, it's clear he was unhinged.

"H-Hold on, you two are talking about her like she's the enemy. So, if we meet her out there... You're not going to... kill her, are you, Pon?"

"I still have unfinished business with Snow White. I still think she's our friend. I'm not gonna kill her if I meet her, that's for sure. Besides, I'm sure she won't do the same... maybe... probably..." said Uluru.

Mana sighed. It seems she's also at a loss.

"Look, I'm gonna level with you. I'll try my best not to do anything rash, but in the heat of battle, if push comes to shove, I'll shove. Whatever Snow White chooses to do is her own choice, and she'll take responsibility for that choice accordingly. If she threatens my life, I'm not just gonna let her take it," said Mana.

Hearing Mana's words, Uluru's eyes widened. "Hey, wait a minute!" she said.

Pfle said nothing.

Fal himself was worried. It's hard to tell from a glance. Cyber Fairies have no expressions, tone of voice, odor, sweat, anything that can be used to tell a person's feelings.

But Pfle can read people, even Cyber Fairies. Their movements, how they bob around. From there, you can tell how a Cyber Fairy's feeling, and Fal is becoming even more and more worried.

It makes sense why. Fal seems to really care for Snow White. It's the same way Pfle's number one priority is saving Shadow Gale.

It's the same...

Fal is a Cyber Fairy, and the relationship between a Fairy and a Magical Girl should be that of Master and Servant, but Fal obviously cares for her more than that.

Just like Kanoe and Mamori...

Even so.

Even so, Mamori needs to come first. She can't forget that fact.

"I know the three of you are capable, and I will also do my best to ensure this. In the coming battle, I'll do what I can. We can hope for Snow White's safety."

Pfle turned her wheelchair around.

"Wait, Pon! That can't be all!"

"I'm sorry, that's all we can do."

"There's more than just hope, Pon! There's more you can do!"

"There's not much else I can do other than ensure the battle plans don't harm Snow White. What more do you expect me to do?"

"Please, tell the higher-ups... Tell them not to kill Snow White, Pon."

Pfle noticed the three of them look towards her.

Uluru, Mana, Fal. All of them were staring at Pfle.

"My hands are tied as is. Telling the higher ups to not harm an enemy general in the middle of a warzone will be a lot more complicated, especially at this stage."

Pfle had already used almost all of her pull to ensure that Shadow Gale won't be harmed by the Osk Faction's attacks.

If Pfle were to go in and add Snow White into the equation, she'd be asking for too much.

The repayment and debt, and the pull that the Osk Faction would have on Pfle would be too massive to consider.

This alliance is already shaky, but putting more weight into it would break the balance.

Asking Osk to spare Snow White is harder than asking them to spare Shadow Gale. Shadow Gale isn't a combatant. Her purpose is to activate the device.

Snow White carries a weapon, is leading an army, and will most likely be fighting them head-on. Such a dangerous opponent like that can't simply be given an easier treatment.

It's not as simple as 'Don't kill her'.

The battlefield is a ruthless place. Knocking out your opponents in a battlefield is harder than actually killing them. When you fight, you need to end it quickly.

With someone like Snow White, the longer you fight her, the more dangerous it would be for you.

Impossible. She can't ask that without overextending her control.

Fal knows that too. He has that look. He knows that Pfle won't be willing to do it.

"Like I said... I'll hope for the best," said Pfle, rotating her wheelchair, turning her backs on the three, and moving on.

Fal's image distorted for a split-second.

Pfle stopped for a bit.

"I'm sorry. In times of war, sometimes we have to make compromises. There's little room for empathy."

Pfle moved her wheelchair forward.

Uluru shouted out, "Wait! Hey! Listen to me!"

Pfle ignored Uluru's cries, she kept moving forward, not looking back.

"Pfle! Can you at least talk with *me* , Pon?"

Uluru and Mana looked at Fal.

Pfle stopped her wheelchair again. This time, she turned around, and looked back at Fal. Fal's movements were stiff, but still bobbing.

"Just the two of us, Pon. Let's talk in private, Pon."

Pfle and Fal took a long look at each other.

☆ Uluru

"Who was she?"

"That was the head of the Human Resources Division. You've met her before, in the car, on the Magical Phone."

"Oh. Her. Yeah, her voice sounded the same, I guess..."

"I'm surprised you're interested. Doesn't seem like something you'd care about."

"I just wanted to know if she was an important person is all..."

"Psh, take it from me, she's a bitch."

To Uluru, Mana acted almost like a child. She's a Mage who dresses up almost exactly like a Magical Girl would.

However, Mages and Magical Girls aren't the same. There were almost as many Mages as there are Magical Girls in the service of the Three Sages.

Some of them she heard to be hundreds, if not thousands of years old. That's the stories that Uluru's heard of, but Mana seems very young in comparison.

She's just a kid trying to be someone bigger. And she's talking down to Uluru!?

Just because Uluru's following Mana doesn't give Mana the right to just drag her around like some pet. That's why Uluru spoke up, and asked her,

"Why are you here?"

"I'm here to catch criminals."

That was a quick response.

"So, you're not trying to stop the ritual, like everyone else here is talking about?"

"If I catch the criminals, there won't be any ritual."

"That's way too optimistic."

"At least I'm actually doing something, unlike you."

That hurt. That statement hurt Uluru. Why did it hurt. Was there a sting of truth in there somewhere?

Is it because Uluru's more passive than the others about stopping Puk Puck's ritual?

Uluru only came in here because she was thrust into all of this after escaping from Puk Puck.

"Well... I'm here for a reason too. I'm gonna stop the bad guys, and I'm gonna make sure they won't do anything bad to anyone anymore. Snow White was supposed to do that with me. If Snow White is a bad guys now... then Uluru will stop her too. Then maybe, maybe I can stop Frederica. Does the Examination Division even know about her?"

Mana widened her eyes, she gritted her teeth.

Uluru saw Mana's expression and was a bit afraid. "W-What's wrong? What did I say now?"

"You mentioned Frederica."

"Oh... I thought you might know her. Yeah, she's a very bad person."

"Agreed. The worst. A disgusting woman."

Uluru glanced over at Mana. "What's wrong? Your face is all weird, are you okay?"

"I'll help."

"Huh?"

"I'll help you catch Frederica."

"Ah, huh? Oh, um... T-Thanks... Um, that was sudden. I uh... I think I'll need all the help I can get... As much as I wanna go after her, I don't think one person alone can do it... So-"

"Can you hear me? I repeat, can you hear me? This is Hammer"

A voice appeared inside of Uluru's head. Everyone seemed to be looking around for a voice as well, but there was no source.

“Don’t bother looking around. I’m sending a broadcast message to everyone. I’m using my magic. You’re not having a mental hallucination or anything like that. In a few minutes, we’re going to be launching an attack on the valley. At that time, the camp will be on full offensive. With that in mind, I’d like to give time to evacuate any non-combat personnel, and anyone who wants out of the fight. Once we start, there’s no turning back. That is all.”

Uluru saw some Magical Girls preparing to leave the camp. Uluru herself was forced into being here.

In reality, she didn’t really want to be here, and she could just leave along with them.

But Uluru didn’t intend to turn back. She’s already come this far. Besides, where can she go back to? She’s kicked out of Puck Manor, and no one would take her in.

Even then...

...Thinking about Sachiko, thinking about Sorami.

When Uluru thought about those two, all thoughts of escape disappeared. She became more confident in herself.

Mana was still thinking in the distance.

Uluru wanted to speak, but Mana interjected,

“Snow White wants to go after Frederica too?”

“Huh? Oh... yeah! Yeah, definitely.”

“Then I guess we have no choice right?”

“What?”

“Let’s go save her.”

Uluru’s eyes widened. Mana walked over to the tent of the Wheelchair Magical Girl. Uluru clumsily ran after her.

Magical Girls who were servants of Puk Puck were living a life that chose them. However, it's not as simple as just serving her.

Sometimes there's competition even among her servants.

That's because in every single one of Puk Puck's closest friends, there exists this thought of wanting to become more useful to Puk Puck.

Puk Puck was their ideal to them.

Everyone thought that way.

Sometimes, they would even have thoughts to get multiple servants to do something else, or try to bring other people into Puk Puck's family.

The only reason they didn't was because they knew that doing it would make Puk Puck sad.

Overworking yourself and forcefully working someone else would make Puk Puck sad, so none of her friends did that.

Puk Puck cares about them all.

When Puk Puck showed her love, Shadow Gale felt very happy. Puk Puck has taught her something important.

All of these Magical Girls working alongside her. They were her colleagues, but also her rivals and her friends.

Friendly competition is good, but all must remember that they're friends in the end. That's what Puk Puck wants.

Shadow Gale wanted to help Puk Puck so much. She wanted to have the biggest contribution to helping her.

Right now, the important thing is to activate the device.

Before Puk Puck could do that, they have to get through the barriers seals and defenses first.

The first seal was on the surface of the device. It's a coating of some sort, emitting an aura. Approaching it closely, seeing it closely, or touching it in some way causes the person who touches it to fall asleep.

Puk Puck already provided detailed instructions on how to remove that seal, using creative application of one of the Magical Girls' powers.

First, the Magical Girls rolled up pieces of sticky paper and broke several rocks and pebbles. They attached the pebbles and other things towards the sticky paper.

These pebbles count as trash. Waste. Garbage.

Far from the effects of the device, the Magical Girls used their strength to throw the sticky papers filled with trash to the device. It stuck to the coating of the device.

Then another Magical Girl came in. Her ability was 'To create a sponge that can clean anything'.

Placing that sponge on a long stick, the Magical Girls rubbed off the trash-filled coating of the device, and the first seal easily came off, as it was 'cleaned' alongside the trash.

Then something happy happened.

"Hey everyone! Wow, it looks like you're hard at work as always!"

Happiness filled Shadow Gale's heart.

Puk Puck came to see us... Puk Puck came to see our progress... I'm so happy!

She came towards them with cookies in a bowl. One by one Puk Puck gave the cookies to the Magical Girls, their faces shining with joy as they ate it.

Shadow Gale also took one bite of it. It was super delicious. Shadow Gale's smile bloomed like a flower.

Magical Girls don't need a supply of sugar to the brain. Functionally, cookies did nothing, as they didn't need to eat. But these cookies were gifts from Puk Puck. The cookies brought Shadow Gale closer with Puk Puck, and she wanted that so much.

It healed her whenever she got close to Puk Puck. She became more optimistic, she would work more efficiently, and her day was instantly

brightened whenever Puk Puck visited her.

But all happy things must come to an end.

"I wanted to tell everyone here something... I'm sorry, but I've got some important things I need to take care of, so I can't be checking in on you guys all the time, even though I wanna."

Shadow Gale became really sad. Her face turned into a frown. The other Magical Girls did too. Puk Puck not visiting them would make Shadow Gale's heart miss her.

"Hey, don't worry okay! You guys know I'll always be here with you in spirit!"

She's right. Puk Puck's always in their hearts and in their thoughts. Whenever they got really sad, Puk Puck always knew what to say.

She just made Shadow Gale happy before she cried at the sadness of not being with Puk Puck.

For Puk Puck's sake, Shadow Gale will work hard. Shadow Gale looked at Puk Puck's face, beaming a smile as she did.

When Puk Puck finally left, she continued to work...

...and work...

...and work...

☆ Pfle

Inside the tent, there was Dark Cutie and Princess Deluge.

Dark Cutie was still sitting and staring at the floor, whereas Deluge was just pondering in the corner.

From the outside of the tent, they heard a voice.

"Excuse me, may I borrow this tent privately for a moment?" said Pfle as she entered the tent.

Dark Cutie stood up, not glancing at anyone as she walked past Pfle, exiting the tent. Before that, however, Pfle stopped Dark Cutie.

“Would you mind watching the entrance for me. Make sure nobody comes in, Dark Cutie?”

Dark Cutie nodded, and exited the tent.

Deluge didn’t respond, she only stood up, and glanced at Pfle with a dark look in her eyes before exiting the tent.

When the coast was clear, Pfle placed the Magical Phone on the armrest of her wheelchair. From there, a stereoscopic image appeared.

“I detect Magical Girls outside the tent, Pon!”

“They’re only watching so no one comes in. We’re alone, here. They won’t listen in. More importantly, what did you want to talk about?”

Fal stopped bobbing around, and lowered his head.

“Please, Pon. Save Snow White, Pon.”

“You said that a while ago.”

“I don’t care what happens to me, Pon.”

“...Now that’s interesting.”

The two stared at each other for a while, not speaking for a few seconds of silence.

Pfle felt sympathy.

Sacrificing everything for the sake of rescuing a wonderful Magical Girl. Giving up everything so that the one person they care about can be saved.

Pfle and Fal.

They shared those qualities.

Pfle felt sympathy for Fal. She couldn’t seem to ignore that side of Fal, and she didn’t think it was in her place to judge when a person wants to do everything for the person they care most in the world.

"Quickly now. Time runs short. Is there something specific you wanted to tell me?" asked Pfle.

"There's something Snow White entrusted to me, Pon."

"Oh?"

"I'm telling the truth, Pon. I'm frustrated that Snow White is suffering, Pon. I know she's suffering, Pon. She took on so many responsibilities, Pon."

"And what's this thing you're referring to?"

"Your memories, Pon."

Pfle had half-expected this answer. It would certainly mean things lined up the way she thought it did.

Knowing this information satisfied Pfle, but she kept a straight face.

"And what of it?"

"I'm not supposed to give it back, Pon. To be honest, I don't really like all this secret keeping myself. Personally... I think it's better if you have it back. I'm sure you'll be able to operate a lot better with everything intact, Pon."

"I also think that's a good decision."

The way she said it made it sound ironic or sarcastic, but Pfle really was glad that Fal was willing to return her memories.

Fal summersaulted three times, scattering the colorful ribbons all over the dark tent.

Fal however, had mixed expressions. He wasn't sure if this was a good sign or a bad sign. He became serious.

"If I return the memories, I want you to promise that you'll save Snow White, Pon."

"...Do you trust me, Fal?"

"I trust you, Pon."

Pfle slightly widened her eyes. Unconsciously, a smile formed in her face. There's not many people who would say that they trusted Pfle. Even if they said it outright, Pfle could often see through it, and know which ones really did trust her.

That's why Pfle knew that Fal was telling the truth when he said he trusted her.

She was used to dealing with people who completely distrusted her and are against her. But now, Fal, a Cyber Fairy, had complete trust in Pfle.

Pfle nodded.

"Alright Fal. I promise, I'll save Snow White. However, with that promise, I have to tell you that she comes second in priority."

"I know, Pon. It's okay, Pon. Your priority is Shadow Gale, right, Pon?"

Pfle's eyes instinctively widened. She gripped her armrest tightly. Her breathing began to unsettle, until she took a deep breath and controlled herself, and she felt sweat begin to trickle down her head.

She placed her finger on her lip, almost biting it, before realizing what she's doing.

"...And... what makes you think that?"

"I was there when she knocked you in the head with a wrench, Pon!"

"Ah... So you were... Makes sense, of course..."

That was the place where Pfle truly revealed the most about herself, that she would do anything for Shadow Gale.

Fal would've been there. Perhaps that's why Fal trusted Pfle. At the very least, he trusted Pfle's willingness to sacrifice herself for Shadow Gale's sake. For the sake of someone you cared about.

That was a trait they both shared.

"In that case, go and open the battery pack on my Magical Phone, Pon!"

Pfle flipped over the Magical Phone and opened the cover of where the batteries should be. However, inside, there were no batteries.

Instead, there was a glowing piece of candy, that glowed with a variety of colors at once, like a rainbow.

Pfle picked it up. She looked up at it as it shined brightly. Its colors weren't consistent, sometimes changing from one to another.

It was beautiful, but also rather creepy.

"This is... familiar," said Pfle as she eyed the outside of the tent.

"Something wrong, Pon?"

"No, you don't have to worry about that. More importantly, can your Magical Phone run without batteries?"

"Oh, it's always been that way, Pon! I don't really know, nor do I care that much. Might be because of how I am, Pon!"

"I see. Well, that's useful," said Pfle.

When Pfle was staring at the outside of the tent, she was actually staring at Deluge, as this was similar to the kind of candy that Deluge consumed. The same type of candy as Blue Bell.

"I have a guess, but what should I do with this?" asked Pfle.

"Lick it, Pon!"

Pfle slowly licked the candy. When her tongue touched it, it instantly melted like foam. Pfle anticipated a sour taste, but it was actually tasteless.

"I see... It's easy enough to understand."

"That's right, Pon!"

There was no headache. No intense flash. The memories just... came back. As simple as that. There doesn't seem to be a sense of discovery.

However, Pfle grasped her fists tightly.

There was a similar experience, a long time ago, when she recovered her memories during the game.

In that game where Fal was playing as her guide, she had remembered all the impure things she had done in the past.

Pfle looked up at Fal.

“My memories, did you also...”

“Only what Snow White saw in Shadow Gale’s heart, Pon.”

“I see... I suspected that Shadow Gale had something to do with it... I guess it confirms it. I just wanted to know.”

Fal bobbed again, the colorful ribbons popping out. Pfle looked down at her closed fist, resting in the armchair.

“I’m going to save Shadow Gale...”

“I know you will, Pon.”

Pfle then looked up at Fal, who looked back with his usual expressionless smile.

“...And I’ll save Snow White too.”

“It’s a promise, right, Pon?”

“Ahaha, I’ve really put myself in a corner, haven’t I? I’m being completely... obedient, vulnerable, and honest... and just blurting out everything I’m thinking about to you... That’s... really troubling for me.”

“Vulnerable? I don’t think you’re being vulnerable, Pon.”

“Oh, trust me, Fal... I’m being a lot more vulnerable than I’d like myself to be, right now.”

Pfle closed the battery case in the Magical Phone. Regardless of whether or not it needs an actual battery, it’s better to keep it closed just in case.

Then, Dark Cutie entered the tent. Pfle looked up abruptly.

“Well, that’s a rather surprising entrance. What’s wrong, Dark Cutie?”

“Glassianne wants to talk,” said Dark Cutie.

“Ah, let her in.”

Glassianne then went inside the tent. No expressions, just fallen shoulders, hanging hands, and a rather slumped back. All signs point to her being tired of the job, and she’s not bothering to hide it in front of Pfle either.

The exhaustion was obvious, because now Glassianne had twice the work. She had to handle the logistics as well as scouting. Without Mi-Chan, a lot of what used to be her work was handed over to Glassianne.

Pfle already knew what was inside Glassianne’s head. She didn’t have to be psychic to find out. She wanted to go home to her store and make sweets again.

Still, Glassianne knew her job wasn’t done.

“What’s the matter, Glassianne?” asked Pfle.

“Um, well... Remember the Magical Girl that the Examiner brought back from Puck Manor? What was her name? The liar? Yeah, well... There’s Clubs soldiers watching her in places she doesn’t even notice. Aces and 3 Face Cards.”

“And you found them?”

“I guess? If I found the Ace, that should mean the lower ones weren’t hiding nearby.”

It would make sense to watch over her with Clubs Shufflin. After all, when you’re trying to muster an army, you don’t want a sudden spy or stranger ruin the whole plan.

Pfle didn’t really want to bother on either side. Now is not the time to make enemies of anyone.

“Is Deluge out there?” asked Pfle.

“Eh, uh, no, I think she left somewhere. Should I find her?”

“No, she’ll come back.”

“Ah, okay.”

“Glassianne.”

“Yes, hello”

“Take an open tent and take a rest, would you? Sleep, take a breather, get some rest and relaxation. If it’s noisy, go find earplugs. Mi-Chan once made a couple, right?”

“Oh, it’s fine... I don’t mind at all. Besides, there was an announcement that we’d be moving out soon, anyways.”

“Your place isn’t the battlefield. Dark Cutie, find Deluge and bring her here, please. I have an errand for her.”

“Understood,” said Dark Cutie in the distance.

“Fal, there’s something I’d like to talk about, but let”

“Where are you going, Pon?”

“We’re going to visit some bad guys.”

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

“How does it look, hm?”

“How does it look? Well...”

Lethe raised her right hand. The two Hearts Shufflin stopped fanning her. She fixed the decorations on her horns, the ones that were a bit messed by the winds of the fan.

With so many people watching her in camp, Lethe has become a bit more sensitive about her appearance. Even if she’s riding in a chair carried by Shufflins.

Hammer didn’t mind that, since she should know when they’ll be attacked.

“Doesn’t look like anyone’s playing out there, hm?”

“Huh? Playing? Well, yeah... It’s wartime. I doubt people would be playing around.”

“This is Puk Puck we’re talking about. If they can’t play with Puk Puck, the servants will decide to play with each other. Having fun is the utmost priority in the Puck Faction. If they’re not having fun among themselves, it means it’s still possible for them to see Puk Puck, meaning we haven’t attacked seriously enough.”

“Is that really something we should put into consideration?”

“Would you put the fact that I always sit in these vintage chairs into consideration of your plans, hm? Regardless of how you yourself feel about them?”

“Well... you know me, I’m just a lowly servant trying to do the best with the hand that I’m dealt with.”

“Your humility doesn’t sound humble at all.”

“...That’s cause it was sarcasm.”

“I wonder if now is the right time to be sarcastic, hm? Perhaps I expected too little of you. Clearly you have a well thought out plan if you have the time to be sarcastic, hm?”

“Er... Well...”

“Hm? Do you or do you not?”

“...My apologies.”

Hammer had to stop the ritual as soon as possible. There’s been too many delays with logistics and troop movements lately.

The gate began to open.

The reason for the delays is due to Hammer not wanting to move in without prior information. She had been waiting for the Diamonds Shufflins to install cameras inside the caverns where it’s safe, expecting traps and ambushes.

“You’re being a bit too paranoid, hm?”

“Better than than get ambushed out of nowhere. If I know the enemy’s movements before they set up, I can prepare. I can find out their tactics as well.”

“Hammer, has anyone told you that you’re not very good at hiding what you think, hm?”

“...I’ll take that as a compliment of my honesty.”

Hammer waited and waited, and when a report came in that a light was pointed from the deep end of the valley, Hammer was relieved.

However, the communication with the Shufflins was suddenly cut off.

“Was there an accident? Come in, hello?”

Lethe raised her eyebrows.

“What happened?”

“A couple of Shufflin 2s just came back from scouting. It seems there’s a Magical Girl sitting alone in the entrance to the ruins.”

“One Magical Girl?”

“Yeah. Puk Puck. She seems to be sitting there alone, on a chair, placed just in front of the entrance pass to the ruins. Multiple Shufflin 2’s with long-range vision confirmed it. The others started running back here.”

Lethe arranged her decorations again. She exhaled.

“Do you think this is Puk Puck playing a game... Or is this a serious strategy?”

“...A play... probably? I don’t think this is something a normal strategist would think of.”

It’s certainly strange to have the bulk of your defense in the backline and only leaving one person, albeit one *very powerful* person, as the lone defender outside.

“It’s abnormal,” said Hammer.

“This doesn’t seem like Puk Puck’s way of thinking. Someone else is planning this strategy.”

Lethe began to think.

“We should be careful not to do anything rash. Don’t use any explosive or blasting attacks to attack the ruins. It might damage the device. Shattering that may cause world breaking destruction.”

The mention of damaging the device made Hammer unnerved. The device was ancient and something she can’t seem to grasp. An existence as powerful as the Three Sages themselves.

Knowing that, Lethe may not be exaggerating when she said it might be world breaking.

“Understood.”

“But I still can’t shake the idea that this strategy doesn’t fit with Puk Puck’s way of thinking. Is she really taking orders from another strategist? Just what is she doing, hm?”

Hammer nodded, she began giving orders to the Shufflins. Just then, Hammer was contacted by the Ace of Clubs.

This was the group that was watching over the Examination Division Magical Girls.

Chapter 6: The Everlasting Radiance

☆ Glassianne

Hired by the Human Resources Division, Dark Cutie and Monoshiri Mi-Chan have faced death-defying situations many times before. Glassianne only vaguely understood them.

In order to increase their chances of survival, Mi-Chan and Dark Cutie dedicated their whole lives to their jobs. They trained every day, at the expense of their pleasure. Glassianne always teased them for that.

She may have understood that, but she's never sympathized with that reasoning. Always thinking about the next job, even in their private lives. Is a life like that worth living?

Even though they get paid in high salaries, Dark Cutie and Mi-Chan's way of life didn't need that much cash. They're far from a position of status or honor.

Glassianne's main duties was support and observation from the back lines. It's not like she didn't want to put her life on the line for the job, it's just that she's not as good as the other two. That's why she could never sympathize with their way of life.

She tried asking this to Mi-Chan once.

"Mi-Chan, why are you in this kind of job? I thought your hobby was books and reading in the library? Is that useful for this job? Don't you wanna relax? Isn't it stressful? You don't seem like the type who loves fighting and killing either."

Mi-Chan listened and laughed. Although she laughed, it wasn't the kind of refreshing laugh you'd make. There was a bitterness in that laugh, but it was still a laugh.

"You're a lot better than I thought you were, Annie. Actually, I like fighting. I don't know about our leader though, have you asked her?"

"I kinda think she already has an answer. She'll probably say something like 'because I'm a villain', don't you think?"

"Mm, pretty much!"

At that time, their conversation ended with just that. Glassianne didn't think Mi-Chan's reply was her serious one. She thought that Mi-Chan just didn't want to have a heart-to-heart at that time. Because for Glassianne, this wasn't the same for her when all is said and done. For her, it's just a job.

They probably didn't want to trouble her with the details. Both Dark Cutie and Mi-Chan. Even so, at times like this, she kept thinking about these things, like something plugging your bathtub drain and wouldn't leave. Even though she couldn't see it, she knew it was always there.

Now, she couldn't talk to Mi-Chan anymore. She was killed. She's gone. She wasn't just sad that Mi-Chan was killed. She was also a little afraid of the enemy who killed her. Mi-Chan was a pro, so her enemy must be a pro too.

That, or she just had no emotion while facing her.

Glassianne regretted not being able to mourn Mi-Chan properly. She also regretted not being able to ask her about her real intentions of joining this job.

While lying down in the tent, Glassianne looked beside her with anger in her head. She saw Dark Cutie. She was doing stretching exercises with her wrists. Placing the tip of her right index finger behind her right hand.

It's natural for someone like her to be exercising her flexibility, but every time Glassianne sees her fingers bend at unnatural angles, she still couldn't believe it.

"Hey, Leader..."

"Yes?"

"You've been in this kill or be killed thing for a while now, right? Even when the current job's done, you still think about the next one, right? Isn't that... stressful? I could never do what you do."

Dark Cutie stretched her spine to the extent that it could be seen from her back. She stretched out her chest as well.

"Because I'm a villain."

Glassianne snorted out a laugh.

Dark Cutie tilted her head in confusion.

"What's so funny?"

"No, no! I'm fine! Don't worry! Nothing's funny! It's nothing! Don't feel bad, it's just... I kind of expected that. I've just been thinking about this for a while, that's all."

Dark Cutie untilted her head, and continued stretching.

"Correction."

"Correction? What do you mean."

"Correction. It isn't because I'm the villain."

Dark Cutie stretched her chest again with a serious face.

"It's because I'm the *leading* villain."

While lying on the ground, Glassianne laughed with her cheeks red and on the sheets. After taking a deep breath and finishing her laughter, she spoke to Dark Cutie.

"Hey, Leader."

"Yes?"

Her voice was a mixture of emotions.

"We have a guest. A card soldier. Diamonds. She's along. No weapons."

Dark Cutie stood up quickly and turned towards the entrance of the tent. A sound was heard, followed by footsteps.

The Diamond's face looked frightened. Looks like she hasn't noticed Glassianne yet. The Diamond had a funny intonation. It's clear she's not used to speaking.

"Pfle summons Dark Cutie," said the card soldier.

Glassianne stood up, Dark Cutie looked at her. Glassianne tapped her calves twice with her middle finger. It's a code for 'No problem'. Glassianne already confirmed that Pfle was speaking with the card soldiers' boss.

She couldn't hear them of course, because she saw them through their glasses, so it was image only. Still, the atmosphere seemed very peaceful. However, just because she knew that Dark Cutie was being summoned, she couldn't figure out *why* she was summoned.

Dark Cutie left with the card soldier, leaving Glassianne alone.

Instead of using her hands as pillows, Glassianne wrapped them around her knees.

Dark Cutie was likely being sent to the battlefield, The Ruins. Glassianne was mixed in with other guests and ushered to a safer place. That's where she'll support the war effort. Though she does feel sorry and think of unnecessary things here. It was only due to fatigue.

But, she didn't think she'd be useful in the battlefield, so she had to trust that she'll be most needed here. She prayed for Dark Cutie's safe return, as she cleared her throat and yawned of tiredness.

☆ Pfle

Unlike the previous 3-way talks, the atmosphere now was a little tense. Hammer chose a place where her boss, Lethe, wasn't around to have the talks.

"Well, if we're trying to re-establish our alliance, it's good to have a cooperative negotiation partner."

"I feel the same way."

Pfle smiled at Hammer. Hammer responded with a smile as well.

Even though they were both smiling, Pfle was conscious of the unpleasant atmosphere radiating between them. Hammer felt the same way.

It wasn't Hammer's intention to be contacted.

The Magical Girl CQ Angel Hammer is a Magical Girl who could see eye-to-eye with Pfle. Like her, she would prefer a profitable outcome for her side. Like her, she would take precautions against any hostile actions.

In an industry where many people do nonsensical things for nonsensical pleasures, it was nice to have a common partner that shared her values.

However, just because they see eye to eye doesn't mean her opponent will be easy to deal with. She's obviously not happy about that.

As a pretext for talking, Pfle noticed the small flowers placed on the bony wings of Hammer. They were Forget-Me-Not flowers. Her costume was mostly light-colored as well.

"True love, or 'Please, don't forget me'. I wonder if this is where the Knight's Tale comes from."

"Huh?"

Her face showed an expression of confusion. Hanakotoba, the Language of Flowers, was what Pfle was talking about. It seems Hammer isn't familiar with it.

It seems that just because there's a detail in a costume doesn't mean the user has a special reason for having it.

Perhaps an investigation would yield some results. Or maybe Pfle *has* looked into it before, and simply forgotten. Oh well, it's better to state the facts than to mull on what may have happened.

"Just because someone starts off in the wrong foot, doesn't mean they can't forge a relationship."

"Eh? Huh? Oh, well... Yeah, you're right. The Osk and Caspar Faction are allies, so where we're going, we won't be enemies. Though we still don't know what we'll do with the Puck Faction."

Hammer began wiping up the stains that the plastic bottles made on the table with her hands. The reason she did this? Not because she was nervous. If she was nervous, she'd wipe the stains with a handkerchief.

No, she wasn't nervous.

She was stressed out.

That's what Pfle thinks.

Hammer knew that Pfle was also trying to capture Premium Sachiko.

It's because they talked about it now.

She should've noticed when she explained her subordinates' Magical Skills. Though Pfle preferred not to say it out loud. She didn't clearly say anything.

But now, the story was different. Pfle's memories have returned. The thick fog has become sunny. Everything she needed to do was laid out in front of her. Not just one or two steps, they were too many to count.

Despite two factions vying for Sachiko, she's passed away now. Still, the Puck Faction was attempting this ritual, and the Osk Faction was trying to capture Sachiko to disrupt it.

But Pfle didn't need to talk about that anymore. From now on, they can all cooperate.

Although Pfle never knew about this, even when she first entered the Human Resources Division, the Human Resources Division was under the jurisdiction of the Caspar Faction for the time being. Thus, because the Caspar and Osk Faction were cooperating, it wasn't strange for Human Resources to cooperate with the Osk Faction as well.

Even though Deluge and Dark Cutie have both tormented Shufflins before, they had to put it all aside now. Uluru was also a Puck Faction Magical Girl, but she couldn't be blamed for that.

Hammer was a Magical Girl realist. Her reality doesn't always align with her faction's, however. She would give priority to herself first. If her faction grows, she'd continue with them because there's a benefit to herself. That was the type of girl she is.

Even if that were wrong, she didn't seem like someone who would gladly sacrifice herself. That was the impression that Pfle had with her talks.

"I've inspected the staff data of the HR Division and contacted the Magical Girls marked 'useful'. Hopefully, if I can spearhead them, I can use them at their full potential."

"My my, you *are* fast."

"I wouldn't call myself the best of the best. I just thought the earlier the better. I had to work with the Examination Division in case I couldn't use my magic on them. Basically, I had professional help... So yeah, it *is* fast."

"I see, I see."

"I'm not sure how to repay you for something this useful, we've got lots of goods you can use."

"I'll make a note and collect it later."

"Very well. Now then, let's not forget about Shadow Gale and Snow White."

"But of course."

At that time, Pfle didn't want to hear, "I understand Shadow Gale is one of your trusted staff members, what about Snow White?" That would be irritating.

"I'd like some info. I can't cooperate without it."

"I feel the same way."

"Combat-focused Magical Girls, a list of their Magical Skills, and also a list of Magical Items."

"Would you like me to exchange you a written list?"

"I wouldn't mind."

"Then I'll go get some paper."

"No need for that, I've prepared it. Sorry, it's not exactly official papers, more like a notepad."

"Ah, it's fine. This is enough."

Pfle handed Hammer several sheets of scribbled paper. Hammer received it and handed it over to a Diamond Shufflin. "Take this to Lady Lethe." The Shufflin nodded and walked with an unnatural walk.

I wonder if saving Mamori will be too much for them to handle.

As Pfle thought of that, she smiled a worried smile. Hammer replied with a smile as well.

They continued to talk about future issues. Pfle focused on topics that concerned both of them. While concealing information regarding Pfle's own issues, she tried to draw out more information out of Hammer.

This doesn't mean just data, numbers, or facts.

Information included Hammer's habits, tics, and traits. Things like what Hammer does in response to questions, her movements, her way of speaking.

Pfle picked up everything.

From there, Pfle determined how she would react to discussion topics. Although she was a Magical Girl that was difficult to understand at first, gradually, she revealed more about herself.

"Excuse me," said a voice behind her.

Pfle rotated her wheelchair 180 degrees. Dark Cutie was standing 3 steps away from her.

She made no footsteps, nor did she give out any signs of her presence. For her, this might as well be enemy territory.

Pfle gestured her hands towards Dark Cutie. Hammer turned to face her.

“This is Dark Cutie. She’s a reliable Magical Girl.”

“So I’ve heard.”

Pfle turned her head towards Dark Cutie.

“Is there a reason you’re here?” asked Pfle.

Dark Cutie’s expression turned cloudy. There was no way for a complete stranger to notice this change of expression. You could only see it if you’ve seen her day to day.

There was no mistake. Dark Cutie’s expression had gotten worse.

“I thought you sent for me.”

“And who told you that?”

“The card soldiers. The Diamond.”

“I never sent for you.”

As soon as Pfle had said those words, Dark Cutie started running out of the tent, with Pfle pursuing close behind.

☆ Glassianne

Currently, Glassianne was forbidden from using her powers to scout the Ruins. There was a possibility that she might see Puk Puck.

“If you fall to the enemy, we lose our eyes and ears”

Pfle had said to her that warning, probably exaggerating a little bit. For better or worse, it worked, and Glassianne heeded those warnings well.

Glassianne was necessary to fight the enemy. Even in the backlines, she’s useful this way. If Glassianne used her magic in the ruins, it was always with a local scouting group, cautiously scouting ahead.

It would be extremely bad if Glassianne converted to the other side. They would be able to steal Glassianne’s Magical Skill. Without even

using her directly, she may start to give false reports to cause confusion.

Because of that, Glassianne never directed her vision to the ruins.

Most of the time, it was directed towards the camp instead.

Magical Girls, Mages. There were so many of them gathered together. It would be hard for them to notice if a Puck spy slipped in. Especially if they're close to a Head of one of the Divisions.

If anyone was doing anything suspicious, it was Glassianne's job to find out.

She continued her work. She checked the surroundings of the camp. Her sight stopped at one suspicious activity.

Card soldiers were gathering around a tent. But wait...

That tent...

...That tent was...

...It's this... tent...

The card soldiers were surrounding Glassianne's break tent. Glassianne placed raised her left arm in front of her face. Her expression was that of shock and fear.



The card soldiers began to enter the tent. Glassianne quickly switched channels to find Dark Cutie. She confirmed that she was with her boss. They were chatting with an angelic Magical Girl from the Osk Faction.

Dark Cutie was behind her boss. Her boss turned around.

Were they betrayed by Osk?

...No, that's wrong. That doesn't seem to be the case. If it was Osk, there's no reason they would let Dark Cutie walk around freely.

Was there another accident?

Glassianne switched channels to her own surroundings. Birds-eye view from above. There were 4 Clubs surrounding her.

It's impossible to move with this cramped space in the tent. They had maces. Their numbers were 5, 6, 9, K.

Glassianne lay her head on the ground, placing her forehead on the tent floor.

"Don't kill me! I don't want to die!"

She cried out loud.

Kill.

Death.

She said those words, those phrases, out loud. Maybe if someone outside heard her, they may come to help her.

Even if they didn't come, if she cried out, the enemy might become impatient, and would try to quickly to finish the job. Even though they did come to kill her, if they were impatient, they may be sloppy or hesitate.

4 Magical Girls swung their maces towards Glassianne. It seems there was no hesitation. However, they were impatient to quickly get the job done. Glassianne had seemingly exposed her vitals with no resistance.

However, 4 people moving in at once created a cramped space.

She should take out the strongest one first.

She grabbed the ankle of the King with her arm, and pushed the King's knee with her other arm. The King fell down, but she didn't drop her mace. The king kept gripping it on her right hand.

Because of that, Glassianne wrapped her arm around the King's right arm, tightening her grip on it. The King's right arm was locked.

At the same time, Glassianne elbowed the King's nose. She held down the King's torso by wrapping her legs around it while bending the King's left arm. The two of them rolled on the floor, and Glassianne wrapped herself behind the King's back, placing the King above her.

She tightened her grip on the King's neck. The other card soldiers raised their maces, but they couldn't bring it down.

The King's body was above Glassianne's, blocking the way. In this position, if Glassianne tightened her grip even more and crushed the King's artery, the King will lose consciousness for a few seconds. In a Magical Girl battle, a few seconds is a long time.

The two of them rolled again, and Glassianne twisted her body in the opposite direction, twisting the King's tibia. While rolling on the ground, Glassianne received a hit by one of the maces.

Glassianne broke the lock and crawled on the floor. She dashed towards 5, grabbed her feet, held her knees, and twisted it, causing 5 to fall towards 6.

At the same time, Glassianne rolled away and dodged 9's mace.

There is no Magical Girl who is used to fighting an enemy on all fours on the ground. However, Glassianne was used to fighting on the ground.

Her face was facing downwards, and she used her glasses to get a top-down view of herself. Using this, she could see the entire battlefield.

She moved like a beast on all fours. Whenever she saw one of her enemies create an opening by trying to attack her on the ground, she would move in to take advantage.

However, if her opponent got used to this fighting style, it would be near-useless. The first chance was her best chance.

She twisted the ankle of 6 and bent it in the opposite direction.

She used timing to her advantage, allowing motion and physics to do the rest. Even someone with Glassianne's strength can break a stronger opponent's limbs.

She bent 5's shin while kicking 9 downwards. 5 screamed out in pain and agony. Glassianne aimed for the corner of the tent, leaving the screaming 5 behind.

However, the 6 that fell over before blocked her escape route. Glassianne noticed 9 running up behind her, but while she dodged, 9 wasn't trying to attack her.

Instead, 9 started running away from the tent. Then Glassianne noticed 5. She was holding something in her hands.

On her right was a spherical object, on her left was a pin. 5 had tears on her cheeks from the pain she endured.

Glassianne noticed it. It didn't even take her a second.

A Magical Grenade .

But it was too late.

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

The explosion caused the tent to be destroyed as dust covered its surroundings. Other tents were also destroyed or blown away.

Several seriously injured Magical Girls came out of the blast zone, although no one was confirmed to have died.

Hammer moved ahead and headed for Lethe. She found Lethe still on her chair. The Shufflin with her was also as confused.

"I know what happened."

"What is it?"

"The Shufflin 2 that came back from scouting, they were mesmerized by Puk Puck. She must've ordered them through their Magical Phones."

"Suicide bombing, hm?"

"They were targeting one of the Human Resources Magical Girls. It seems like she and 3 Shufflin were killed."

“Human Resources?”

“The one who can see remotely. She was extremely useful for us.”

“So they’re planning on taking out my eyes, hm?”

“Well, it seems so... Earlier I exchanged information with the Head of HR, I gave it to a Shufflin 2. She may have reported it to Puk Puck.”

CQ thought of what happened before. She made a blunder.

Puk Puck’s powers had an immediate effect over your imagination.

Back then, when she used it on Hammer, it wasn’t on her full power. That time was subtle, and grew slowly.

In any case, this means they’ve allowed the enemy into their midst without Hammer knowing.

She had to carefully examine everyone in the camp. All of their ‘guests’. They allowed Shufflin some slack because Shufflins were always considered as close as henchmen.

Thus, they missed their unnatural behavior of always looking at their Magical Phones.

“As I thought, hm?”

“What’s wrong?”

“This doesn’t seem like Puk Puck’s usual methods. The sense of playfulness is low.”

Lethe rose from her seat, folding her fan over her right palm.

“She seems to be doing everything in her power, with almost no time for leisure, hm? Focusing all her efforts on making the ritual a success, hm?”

“It seems so...”

“Then we must hurry. How far are the next scouts?”

“They’re halfway to the ruins.”

“We’re moving out. Come, we may be able to catch up with them on the way.”

“H-Huh!?”

Just then a Hearts ran towards Hammer. She whispered in her ear, and Hammer’s face frowned.

“What’s wrong, hm?”

“It seems that we’ve captured an enemy soldier. They’re being interrogated as we speak.”

“In torture, anything is fair play. However, at a time like this, we mustn’t forget humanitarianism.”

“Well, I don’t support it, but she was captured from the Ruins, so she can’t exactly be innocent, either.”

“Hammer, you really are wicked, hm?”

“No! On the contrary, my stomach hurts bad thinking about this. It wasn’t me who asked for the torture!”

“Then who’s the torturer, hm?”

“Er... it’s the Puck Faction Magical Girl.”

☆ Uluru

Uluru didn’t really want to go against Puk Puck. However, she wanted answers.

She was told that everything would be fine so long as the ritual succeeded. She wanted to know what she wasn’t told.

She was convinced before, whenever Lady Puck smiled, she would feel calm and smile as well. Now, a dark cloud of doubt surfaced in her mind.

She couldn’t decide if Puk Puck was really on the right side.

The enemy captured by the card soldier was someone Uluru didn’t recognize. Was it one of the mercenaries that Puck hired?

Her costume was fluffy and made of sponges. She didn’t look like she was capable of fighting at all. Her magic seemed useless for battle too.

She was apparently captured by falling down a hole.

No, she's too useless to be a mercenary.

Uluru approached the sponge Magical Girl. She whispered in her ear.

"Be quiet, no one's around. I'm a spy, I'm with the Puck Faction."

The Sponge Magical Girl looked surprised, but then she nodded. She believed everything that Uluru was saying.

The Sponge Magical Girl was in shock. Uluru was a Puck Faction Magical Girl, but the part about being a spy for the Puck Faction.

That was a lie, and Uluru believed it was a lie.

Uluru gripped her right fist. It's not good to think about things that'll distract herself.

"Now you tell me everything you know, okay? Everything you tell me will benefit the Puck Faction."

"Y-Yes! I understand!"

"What's your name? What's your Magical Skill?"

"Magical Pongey. I can use my Magic Sponge to clean any dirty things"

"Clean up dirt? So how are you supposed to fight with that?"

"No, no, I'm not good at fighting. But... I was very useful at the device. I helped in activating it! But since I had nothing to do after that, I decided that... I wanted to help Lady Puck and be even more useful... So I wanted to go into battle..."

"You helped in activating the device?"

"Yes. I removed the first seal for it. I was told that only I could do it... But after that, I had nothing to do, so..."

"The device, what do you know about it, what does it do?"

"Um... Magical Girls enter the device, then they can live forever in it. That's how more magical energy could be created. When it's activated,

I'm going inside, myself! That means I'll always be watching over Lady Puck! Isn't that just the best?"

Magical Pongey smiled so brightly, but Uluru felt the opposite.

"After the seals are broken, Lady Puck will modify the device, then be able to use it. Even then, it's pretty hard to use. The chances of success is a bit low. But it's okay, because if that happens, we can just use the contract! It's said to give loads of luck, and we can use it successfully!"

Sachiko's contract.

Hearing those words, Uluru fell down in shock.

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

"The Ex-Puck Magical Girl, hm? Is she capable of getting reliable information by interrogation?"

"She can make them trust her and any stories she makes up. It seems the info checks out too. It looks like our prisoner was assigned to the Device, but because her job was done and she had nothing to do, she went out to the battlefield."

"And that's how she was caught, hm?"

"When asked about how they plan to modify the Device, the answer was Shadow Gale. The Magical Girl Pfle talked about. She's going to alter the device so that it accepts Magical Girls and generates power from them."

"Oh..."

"Y'know, ignoring the fact that we're against them, the idea of crossing over the limits of magic is actually a good idea. Even our research teams have been trying to figure it out."

"Is that what they say, hm?"

"Yeah, actually"

"And how do you know this information is reliable, hm?"

“Pfle gave me a list of Magical Girls, including missing ones that were taken by the Puck Faction. I compared the procedure that the prisoner said happened with her actual Magical Skill. It seems to match up. Her behavior also matches up with how most Magical Girls are like when they’re affected by Puk Puck.”

Lethe held her fan towards the sun. From the way the sun shined, her face seemed to be heated up. This was the first time Hammer would’ve seen her face in any kind of stress from something.

“So, you’re sure this information is in fact, reliable, hm?”

“Absolutely. This info was retrieved using magic too”

“Then I’d like to inform everyone”

“Are you sure? Some people might be too afraid and abandon us.”

“I don’t care, let the cowards flee. Shufflin 2 requires no motivation. Mercenaries and those who come for money have theirs as well. As for Puk Puck’s... toys. If we find out who they are, we will forever pressure them, until they pop. A worse fate than death, hm?”

★ Pfle

Puk Puck’s intentions...

...Hammer’s voice clearly echoed in her head, explaining how Puk Puck intends to misuse the Device, and everyone clearly knows that Puk Puck is now the number one enemy.

Irrespective of their original reasons, everyone had the same thought.

If we don’t stop Puk Puck now, the entire world is in danger .

Whether it’s because of money, status, ethics, for the time being, Puk Puck became ‘Public Enemy number 1’.

At that time, there seemed to be a lot of confusion and chaos. The Shufflins quickly quieted down much of the rabble.

While all this was plus, it doesn't affect the negatives of losing Glassianne. Puk Puck pinpointed Glassianne and aimed for her. They knew about Glassianne's existence. The Shufflin 2 that took the list of Magical Girls given by Pfle immediately prioritized the most important target first.

Glassianne had no protection, and her fighting ability was lower than most of the combatants, but her Magical Skill exceeded any fighting skill she could offer. Her strategic mind was also an asset.

If it were Pfle, she'd also target Glassianne first.

The enemy is formidable. The Shufflins sent first were already manipulated when they had returned. They saw a gap in their mind's defenses and they struck it hard. A ruthless and good strategy.

Did Pfle underestimate the Three Sages? Or perhaps it's someone else that she underestimated...

...The Magical Girl Hunter, Snow White came to mind.

Pfle gritted her teeth.

"Boss. Deluge is here."

"Ah, thank you. Let her in, please."

Dark Cutie seems to be acting as if nothing was wrong. She had the same expressionless face that solidified her stoic character ever since her Anime broadcasted. Despite losing her comrades Mi-Chan and Glassianne, she couldn't detect any trace of sorrow or mourning in her face.

Pfle wondered how it affected her inside. Pfle couldn't see it from the outside.

Princess Deluge came into the tent, replacing Dark Cutie. Now her, Pfle was able to see that something was affecting her outside.

Deluge was confused, and Pfle knew exactly why.

"I need to talk to you about something."

“What?”

It was very subtle, but Pfle knew that Deluge didn’t care about Pfle. From that small one-word reply, Pfle could only detect negative emotions.

Was it anger? Murderous intent? Or was it...

“You’ll be leaving soon, and I’d like to settle this before you could go. It’s about the Man-Made Magical Girl Project. The one that turned you into a Magical Girl”

Deluge’s expression changed. She looked at Pfle straight in the eye. She was clearly gritting her teeth.

“A while back, I regained my memories. It seems I was a part of that project.”

☆ Princess Deluge

Deluge’s body moved faster than she could think. She projected her trident on her right hand. She pointed the spear directly at Pfle’s throat.

The temperature around the tent lowered immensely. The tips of Pfle’s curly hair began freezing and turning white.

“What are you talking about?”

“I was an investor. I paid a large sum of money to fund the Man-Made Magical Girl Project, led by a Magical Girl named Lapis Lazuline. We wanted to develop our own technology of creating Magical Girls, that was being monopolized by the Land of Magic. As Magical Girls, our hearts were held by the Land of Magic. Even while negotiating we couldn’t see eye-to-eye. We wanted to escape.”

“And you just believed in those kinds of things?”

“It seems I did...”

Pfle turned on the Magical Phone placed on her lap while nervously looking at the trident pointed at her throat.

A stereoscopic image floated. Deluge opened her mouth.

“Fal...”

“Hello, Deluge. It’s been a while, Pon.”

“You too...? You lied to me? You deceived me, too?”

“No, Pon. And Pfle wasn’t exactly deceiving you, either, Pon.”

According to Fal, in order to escape investigations, Pfle had her memories of the Man-Made Magical Girl Project removed. It was passed by Shadow Gale towards Snow White.

On the condition that Pfle would rescue Snow White, Fal returned those memories to her.

Whether or not Pfle or Fal deceived her, it didn’t matter anymore. Deluge gripped her trident tighter.

“Wait, Pon!”

Deluge stopped at Fal’s cry.

“This can’t just be solved by killing Pfle, Pon! Remember what you wanted to do, Pon! You need Pfle. You wanted to use her, Pon!”

Deluge’s grip on her trident loosened. Pfle breathed a sigh of relief as Deluge pulled the trident away from her.

“Thank you, Fal. I also agree on that, even though you were doing it, I was actually concerned for my life there.”

“Though I wasn’t doing it to save you, Pfle.”

“Heh, you had that stance in the game, too.”

“I don’t remember that, Pon.”

“It’s fine if you don’t.”

Pfle’s expression tightened, and she turned to Deluge. She smiled. Deluge knows Pfle’s smile, but there was no enjoyment behind it.

Despite hiding behind pleasantries and sarcasm, Pfle’s entire body seemed to be tense. Both of her hands were gripped into fists on her

laps, clenched so tightly you could separate the reddishness from the whiteness.

“Deluge. I can show you research materials on Man-Made Magical Girls. I can show you how to balance your body before and after transforming. I can supply you with supplements and necessary items, including the medicine you need to maintain Luxury Mode.”

Gradually, Deluge planted her trident on the floor. The speartip piercing the ground. The ambient temperature became warm once again.

“I can show you information too. Why you were gathered, why you fit the criteria. I know what I’ve done was selfish. I realize that.”

Deluge gritted her teeth and glared at Pfle.

“If there’s anything else that you need. Please, let me know.”

Anything else that she needed? What did Deluge need now? What did she want now? Her thoughts froze. No words came out. She was frightened by those words that wouldn’t come out.

She doesn’t think that she has a clear goal in mind anymore.

Pfle looked up at Deluge, and she hid her eyes.

“When you kidnapped Shadow Gale, I held a grudge against you. But now, I don’t blame you anymore. Instead, I blame the one who used you and created you. My acquaintance.”

Deluge leaned forward with her right leg. The angle of her trident rose steadily. She placed her face close to Pfle.

“Deluge!”

She heard a voice from Fal. She didn’t register any more than that.

“What do you mean?”

“Lapis Lazuline. My financial partner. Do you remember a woman who trained you. Who taught you all you needed to know as Magical Girls? That was her.”

The mentor that made everyone other than Prism Cherry into Magical Girls. The mentor that gave them their medicine. The mentor that taught them about Disruptors.

Professor Tanaka.

It's been a while since she was mentioned. It's been a while since she's shown her face again. Deluge was worried about her. Everyone was worried about her. Though she fell out of Deluge's mind, until Pfle mentioned her. She should've thought of her first.

"Do you remember anyone guiding you, at all? Unnaturally?"

Deluge remembered. Instructions that came from an unknown source. Paper. Information. Indirectly sent. An invisible benefactor.

When Deluge thought about the death of the Pure Elements, her path of revenge started there.

"There's another Lapis Lazuline. Someone who inherited the name. Her powers are to extract memories and emotions, and store them into candies."

Deluge's trident fell off her hand and made a clanking sound as they hit the floor.

"Blue Bell..."

"By manipulating emotions and memories, she can make anyone into a different person entirely."

Deluge picked up her trident and hurriedly tried to get out of her tent.

"Blue Bell-Lazuline is already gone. I already tried searching for her a while ago. She's not in camp."

Deluge stopped in her tracks at Pfle's words. She turned around. Pfle was watching Deluge while breathing heavily.

"I don't know what her original plan was. What I believe... I believe she was trying to make you into a terrorist. Kidnapping Shadow Gale, using you as a third party, to attack both Puck and Osk Factions without putting herself at risk."

Pfle narrowed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"It's not just the Land of Magic. It seems she detests the very concept of Magical Girls. I don't know what's going on inside her head, but I do know that you chose none of this. You, Me, we were all played by Lazuline. And... And I'm about to use you for my own ends again, but... Like Fal said before, you're should use me too."

Pfle extended her right hand. Deluge retreated one step back. She wasn't fully convinced with what Pfle said.

She stabbed her trident to the ground.

"You're a selfish, self-serving bitch."

"I know... You're right..."

The two of them stared at each other. Pfle quietly looking at Deluge, Deluge glaring at Pfle.

Deluge had been deceived and used. When she escaped from her crisis and tragedy, all her friends had died.

Afterwards, she had been deceived and used again...

Deluge clenched her grip, raising it and her trident upwards. Then, she violently stabbed it towards the ground.

The concrete ground froze beneath her.

Just how long... have I been manipulated?

"I am *not* going to be fooled again."

"I know"

"I'm going to use you."

"I agree with that."

Deluge raised her trident, the scattered snow drops falling on Pfle as she did.

Chapter 7: Take My Hand

☆ Shadow Gale

To say that delays in their work are causing no progress to be made would be incorrect. However, it was difficult to progress without delays.

It's rather more appropriate to say that work is progressing very slowly.

When they uttered the phrase, "It's a little slow, but we're progressing bit by bit," there were no positivity in those words.

"Thanks to slow progress, we're just feeling more powerless and irritable," is what they really meant.

Her job was clear. Shadow Gale was to modify the Device. Make it according to what Puk Puck thought was appropriate.

However, until that time comes, they encountered problems that kept piling up. The Magical Girls had to solve them each one by one.

The first obstacle was a seal that covered the surface of the Device. It was a magical seal that could make you sleep if you so much as see or touch it.

Using the magic of '*Contaminating anything from a distance*', they managed to dirty it up with trash.

Then, they wiped it clean using a magic that '*Could clean any garbage*'.

Next, they had to deal with the hard and thick external armor that's blocking the way. There were neither any openings or screw holes to work with.

Without any way to twist or grasp it, you're forced to *drill through* it. In addition, because there was a barrier inside of that, they have to stop drilling whenever they reach it.

The *Extremely Hard Nails* Magical Girl scratched through the exterior. She attempted a method of peeling off the armor without touching the

barrier.

Her nails, which can rip through both steel or titanium started to crack in its toughness. Blood began to flow out.

Every time she reached her limit, the Magical Nail Artist Magical Girl had her nails regenerate, and she'd continue in her drilling job.

They had to clear each process one by one in order. In the meantime, the other *parts* ...

The Magical Girls chosen to ensure the ritual's success were made to wait. Because they have to use their abilities professionally, they weren't allowed to help the others.

Because the Magical Girls who finished their work have lost their purpose, they often volunteered to go to the battlefield.

However, no matter how badly they wanted to go,

I'll keep my grateful feelings aside

On the way, they would always be prevented from heading out into the battlefield.

On the way, their work seemed to be stagnant. Magical Girls who stopped working would be bathed in cold stares by the rest of the group.

However, just because they're in a hurry doesn't guarantee good results. If they merely rush carelessly in order to finish as quickly as possible, then that's unforgivable.

They'd already taken care of the first layer.

They've somehow peeled off the second coating exterior.

Now they must enter a password to open a huge lock.

Although it's been troubling so far, locks and passwords were a terrible substitute. With a 20-digit PIN code containing hundreds of thousands of combinations of letters, numbers, and symbols.

With it randomly changing every few seconds, it was a Magical Password that didn't want to be cracked. Without the instructions given

by Puk Puck, they couldn't even begin to decipher it.

First, they used a Magical Skill to give the Device a pseudo-personality. Another Magical Skill would make it stunned enough to repeat the same password. After that, all they had to do was match the timing to get the password.

However, it wasn't as easy as that.

Shadow Gale was often asked by Pfle to remodel machinery in their everyday life. Always ordered to do troublesome things or modify devices she's never worked with before, pulling all-nighters to complete it, and she never had high motivations when she was working on it.

Now is different. Now, she was burning with sense of purpose, with no thoughts of idleness at all.

It wasn't just Shadow Gale either. The other Magical Girls were the same. Although they weren't on good terms, they had the same motivation in their heart. They were all there to work together to activate the Device.

They wanted to please the great Puk Puck, they wanted to make her smile, they wanted her to stroke their heads pleasantly.

Any spare time and spare labor that they have were used to proceed towards the goal.

That's right, their will was rising. There was no mistaking it. However, the atmosphere gradually stagnated.

High ceilings. This was a large closed space, with nowhere to run. The large device clogged up the room with little worry. The Magical Girls that she had just met face-to-face today and yesterday paused their work, and continued again. There was no way to make a friendly atmosphere.

There were people who reported on mistakes, there were people who investigates, there were people who clicked their tongues, and there are people who merely openly obeyed.

Were they exposed to the atmosphere? Even though their number's not up, they were frustrated even at Shadow Gale. Their annoyance of this place only grew, like a balloon that kept on inflating, one prick of a needle could pop it.

But they'd already passed that point. At this rate, even without a needle, they would probably pop.

Two Magical Girl's faces appeared on the entrance.

"Hey everyone! You're all working super hard, I see!"

It was as though a ray of sunlight shone from there. As if the warmth of spring, and the sweet smell of tropical fruits radiated from the entrance.

Shadow Gale recalled the concept of *happiness*.

There was something good in this world. Something wonderful like this existed.

The Magical Girls who were working all stood up at once.

"Yes! Yes we are!" they shouted out, as they were restrained and sat down again.

But no one returned to work. Everyone in the room was intoxicated at the sight of Puk Puck.

There was no more sign of their bubbling frustration. It wasn't like it gradually withered away, it was as if it was never there in the beginning.

Following behind Puk Puck, the White Magical Girl, *Snow White*, entered the room. She gave instructions to her. From behind Puk Puck, the Magical Girls working under her appeared.

They were holding large monitors, batteries, cords, and cardboard boxes. They arranged the monitor and batteries while trying to avoid the large device. They plugged in the extension cord.

The Magical Girls who were working on the device were watching silently.

Snow White gently approached Puk Puck. She whispered something in her ear. Seeing Snow White do that was enough to make Shadow Gale jealous. She didn't express it, she only tightly gripped her fists.

Puk Puck smiled and nodded. She turned towards the Device Activation team.

"This is a *present* from Puk!"

The monitor was far taller than Shadow Gale, and decorated with various origami decorations. As soon as Puk Puck clapped her hands, the power turned on at the same time. Color gradually filled the black screen.

Soon, Puk Puck's face appeared on that screen. One by one, the monitors were all filled with Puk Puck. In one of them she was singing, in another she was dancing.

"I realize that you all missed me so much. So, I've decided to stream Puk's very own movies to you all! That way you'll always remember me! Good luck in your work, okay!"

All the Magical Girls applauded with delighted expressions. The Magical Girls who placed the monitors, and even Snow White.

All of them clapped and praised Puk Puck. Puk Puck was beautifully embarrassed. She blushed and pointed her face down.

"Oh, I almost forgot, there's some other stuff too!"

She also began distributing bags with colas and potato chips. While working, everyone smacked their lips.

Puk Puck dropped by Shadow Gale.

"Shadow Gale, when you're all done with work, you're gonna be in charge of launching it, mmkay?"

Out of all the other Magical Girls, Shadow Gale could feel only honor at being selected as the chosen one.

"Okay!" she replied with a raised voice.

“Alrighty, then! Here you go!”

A piece of paper was presented. On the A4 sized paper, various things were written on it. A checkmark was attached to it.

It looked to either be a questionnaire or a contract of some kind.

“This is a super *premium* contract. I’ll let you keep hold of it, Shadow Gale. When I contact you, it’s very important that you use it, okay? Don’t lose it, okay?”

“Okay, understood!”

“You don’t have to be the one to use it, Shadow Gale. When the time comes, I’ll teach everyone how to do it. If we ever get in a pinch, then we may just have to use it there and then. Buuut, I’d appreciate it if you contact me first before using it, okay? Using it on your own is a *big* no-no, got it?”

“Got it. I understand!”

Shadow Gale took out a notepad so she wouldn’t forget the instructions. Puk Puck smiled happily when she saw that. It was a smile that could sway anyone.

Of course, Shadow Gale’s heart was also swayed.

Even after she was gone, the monitors kept on reflecting her figure. The other Magical Girls, without complaining nor sourness, all headed for the Device.

Puk Puck had soothed all their irritation and anger. Morale had improved. For the sake of Puk Puck, they had a superior feeling when they worked.

If I can’t do it, then no one else will .

Those feelings of obligation began rising up without stopping. Any obstacles were swept away like lies. One by one, everything began to connect.

Because of Puk Puck’s gifts, everything was turning out great. This was the power of Puk Puck. This was because of Puk Puck.

Shadow Gale thanked God for guiding her to Puk Puck.

☆ Puk Puck

After placing the monitors, Puk Puck hurried back to her own post. Originally, she wanted to leave the job of placing the monitors to her friends.

However, when she was preparing the monitors to be brought to the Device chamber, Snow White suggested that Puk Puck visit them directly.

“The other *parts* are stressed out from overworking, Lady Puck. Your magic’s decaying at a faster rate than usual with them. I’m getting reports that at this rate, it’s going to affect their work progress.”

“Then they won’t be my friends anymore, won’t they... I’d really dislike that.”

“If you always maximize your magic, you can maintain their state. So, you should have those monitors play your videos endlessly, Lady Puck! Fortunately, there’s mountains of your videos available online.”

“I get it! Alright, let’s do it, then!”

“If you gift it to them together, I think those girls will be motivated even more. Our plans hinge on whether the device activates or not. So, let’s treat them as well as possible, ‘kay?”

What Snow White said sounded like a very good idea. If the device is activated, then everyone can be Puk Puck’s friend. If it wasn’t activated, then everything she’s done up till now will be a waste.

She would hate that.

“Alright, let’s do what you suggested, Snow!”

“Thank you so much!”

As a result, when Puk Puck entered the room, the Magical Girls who looked like walking corpses soon surged with life.

Their facial expressions were glittered with their joy. Their actions were only towards one purpose, activating the Device. They were all struggling together as one.

What Snow White said really was a good idea.

"Thanks a bunch for this, Snow. I know, I'll repay you by baking some hotcakes later!"

"No, no... It's fine. Serving you for your sake is the only thing I would ever want, Lady Puck."

Snow White really has been working well. According to her advice, Puk Puck befriended the Shufflins, who were then sent back to camp.

They regularly communicated using Magical Phones, getting them to work within the enemy camp. They shared important information.

Important information on one of the Osk Faction's Magical Girls. The one that Puk Puck thought was the most disgusting one is the Remote Scout Magical Girl.

She had chosen her, and said her goodbyes. As much as she wanted to befriend her, there was no room for mistakes.

Snow White's ideas, combined with Puk Puck's ideas made the ultimate strategy, and thus they became successful.

Puk Puck couldn't possibly think of this if she were alone.

It wouldn't be as fun, it wouldn't be as happy , thought Puk Puck.

Because of Snow White. If that girl sets her mind to executing a plan, Puk Puck felt a bit scared, but at the same time, she knew she could depend on her.

"Well then, Snow. Puk's off to keep watch again!"

"Good luck!"

"Yep, yep!"

Even the idea of Puk Puck keeping guard, neither Puk Puck nor any of her friends could've thought of that idea. That was all Snow White's idea,

Puk would only add bits of her own suggestions to it, to make it nicer, and so that it'll be glittering with joy.

“I’ve selected the escorts for you”

“Then let’s both do our best!”

“Of course, we will.”

“I know, but if Puk’s being stopped from doing her best, Snow?”

“If that happens, if our enemies manage to enter the ruins...”

Snow White turned around and wielded a weapon in her right hand.

“...I’ll take care of them.”

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

They had passed the gate, and entered the valley leading up to the ruins.

It would be 10 kilometers from here, if they followed the winding path, they’ll reach the entrance of the ruins.

Using a Magical Girl’s speed, it should be faster than cars. Their marching speed increased.

The calm and relaxed atmosphere that was characterized by exchanging business cards and small talk were all blown away.

If they don’t advance, they will die.

If they don’t fight, they will die.

If they lose, they will die.

If the Device is activated, they will die.

The air was full of those dreadful thoughts. If the Puck Faction activated the Device, then their leadership will be taken away. All their interests will be directed there. It’s not just about their world. Activating this Device would destroy the very existence of Magical Girls.

A fate worse than death as miserable livestock awaited them.

As everyone had the same thoughts and purpose, their speed increased. Of course, being fast alone meant nothing. Only combined with caution would their speed have any meaning.

On that regard, the Mascot Character *Fal* was very useful for scanning enemies through walls. A Magical Girl's resistance to surprise attacks is much higher than usual.

Because of that, their speed increased.

By following this road, they could see the traces of vehicles being driven through them. However, the people following these tracks couldn't use vehicles of their own.

If they suspected a trap, they would order the Shufflins to advance forward. The *Hearts Death Squad* would go first, and the other Magical Girls would follow behind them.

Well, at last they've found the Ruins. The Puck Faction's abandoned trucks were all left, parallel parked together. Through this passage, they'll find a large Plaza before the Ruins proper. From there, if they don't go through the entrance, then they won't be able to get in the Ruins at all.

Lethe gave instructions as she was being shaken while riding her palanquin.

“Get rid of that truck at once, hm.”

“Careful not to approach it, it might explode.”

“Then do it faster.”

It took some time to confirm that the trucks really were trucks. While that was happening, Lethe's mood gradually became worse.

“Well, it's a normal truck, isn't it, hm?”

“Er, yeah. It's um, just a normal truck.”

“Then let's walk over the top of it, shall we? If we remove the tires, that should be good enough, hm.”

“Ah, right. Of course, at once.”

The Diamond Shufflins approached, using a tire jack to remove the truck's tires. Leaving the trucks here seems to be some sort of stalling technique, at least that's the kind of role it's supposed to play.

While being frustrated, Hammer helped the Shufflin IIs pass over the top, bottom, and sides of the truck.

Using a pile of stones, they built a staircase. Which they used to climb over the trucks. Finally, in one line, the party arrived at the large Plaza in front of the Ruins, and from there, passed through the entrance.

Before they entered the large open space that is the Plaza, Fal took his time to scan for any Magical Girls.

There was only one Magical Girl standing in front of the Ruins. She was barely caught by Fal's radar.

That was probably Puk Puck .

Hearts Shufflins began to sneak from some boulders to the Plaza, to confirm who awaits them before the Ruins.

Then they forgot all about the others, and started running towards the Ruins. They didn't return. As a result, they confirmed that it was the Magical Girl Puk Puck awaiting them.

Before they entered the valley, they would often sacrifice several scouts of Shufflin IIs ahead. They had to deal with Puk Puck's magic carefully. They can't just blindly attack her.

The round Plaza had a large diameter of over 3 kilometers wide. It isn't much different than the size of the Ruins itself.

Therefore, from the Plaza to the Ruins, they'll have to attack and reach a distance of 3 kilometers. Added to that, they had the handicap of making sure they don't see Puk Puck.

The Shufflin II *Building Squad* was ordered to widen the road, stationing them in a place unseen by the Ruins. There, they called and stationed the endlessly growing army, all collected together.

However, no matter how many troops they arranged, if they attacked head-on, all that would happen is that they decrease their own numbers and added to the enemy's.

If creatures with sentience always get attracted to Puck, then they'll use machines with no sentience instead. Simple solution, right?

First, they called in a few small unmanned autopilot tanks, but they were mercilessly destroyed by Puk Puck's simple throwing stones. Not even one hit from the tanks hit their mark. According to the Mascot, Fal, every attack was avoided.

It seems Puk Puck was extremely agile.

Of course, Hammer couldn't help but remember Grim Heart. The Three Sages have bodies with outstanding physical abilities.

They immediately cancelled the launch the unmanned airstrike drones, originally planned for a bombing run. The entrance to the Ruins was also a bad place to lay down landmines. Explosives will cause landslides, which could damage the Ruins themselves.

The same is true for large fires or floods.

Hammer bit her lips. Each second shouldn't be wasted. She didn't know if she had enough time or not. The Device won't be useless for long. Still, she had to look for a solution.

The Spade Shufflins all went in a horizontal line and threw their spears at once. Even though they couldn't see their target, she was betting on one or two spears hitting their mark. If they didn't hit her, they'll repeat it again and again.

The moment the spears flew, the enemy escaped inside the ruins, thus none of the spears hit their mark. While trying not to see the site of battle, it was a bit of a shame, because the enemy didn't return fire, rendering the wall of Hearts useless.

Other than temporarily escaping inside the Ruins, Puk Puck didn't move from her spot. She kept holding her position in the entrance, without running, walking, or even jumping around.

Lethe has only visited the site once before coming again with her main army. This time, she came with sentries.

Lethe sat in a folding chair and took command. The boulders were carried away. There were grinding and clacking noises all around. She looked like a construction site director ordering her builders.

“It seems you’ve not been successful, hm?”

“Ah, well, yeah. Not so much.”

“And what’s Pfle doing, hm?”

Lethe was concerned for Pfle. That was surprising. Hammer answered without any warmth.

“The short version, she’s gathering up the mercenaries collected by Human Resources. Well, it seems she’s hard at work. A good thing, right?”

“What kind of Magical Girl do you think she is, hm?”

“Well, not a good one. The Osk Faction attacked her mansion to search it. In the end, nothing came out of it. However, although nothing came out of that attempt, based on our data, it looks like she was in the middle of preparing something. She definitely sounds like a bastard.”

“Very much so, hm?”

She couldn’t grasp her, as if she were an unnoticed spy camera Magical Girl.

To Hammer, Pfle was very much an unknown. But did Pfle also fail to grasp Hammer as well?

The people that Hammer didn’t have a grasp on, were they unbelievably incompetent, or did they have a talent that Hammer just couldn’t measure? Which is it?

Since this Magical Girl has successfully climbed the ladder to become the Head of a Division, she couldn’t possibly be incompetent. Which means she must be the latter.

"However, even if she's not what we would consider proper. At a time like this, we should utilize her"

"And where is that lot, now?"

"Waiting by the trucks."

They should use words that were nice to hear. She continued telling them that they're to "*Keep guard*".

Hammer had no authority to lead Pfle's people. They were still there the last time she saw them.

She had the Shufflin IIs watch over them under the pretense of an escort, so she wouldn't have to be too cautious of them. However, despite them being allies, having them around still made her feel uneasy.

With her fan, Lethe tapped on her forehead.

"It's a curious thing, isn't it, hm?"

"Absolutely so"

"Not only Shadow Gale, but she's advancing for Snow White too, hm?"

"Well, she's promised for her cooperation, and that should be sufficient enough."

"Of course, I'll keep my end of the promise for cooperation's sake. However, cooperation or not, accidents can happen. Especially since Shadow Gale seems to be a central figure for the Device's activation. If she's out of the equation, if the Device can't be activated, then those hotblooded ones might do something quite selfish, hm?"

Lethe looked around at her surroundings.

"Assemble an Assassination Squad, have the Ace of Clubs lead the charge, hm?"



“...Ah.”

“I’ve heard that teleporting directly to the Ruins itself is difficult, hm”

“I’ve gotten into contact with some people who work on teleportation. Unfortunately, no one’s willing to do it. This place is far too special. You’d

need some hypersensitive spatial recognition, otherwise it's impossible."

"Then we have to find a place where Puck can't see us, hm?"

Recently, Hammer's been struggling so much because of Puk Puck herself. If her opponent wasn't Puk Puck, if it were any other Magical Girl, it would a lot easier.

Other Magical Girls...

...If they took care of the Magical Girls that Puk Puck gathered to activate the Device, then the ritual will fail, because it'll be impossible to activate the Device.

Although Hammer didn't feel like advancing at this moment, she knew that in the end that would spell tragedy.

If they fail here, all is lost.

"Well, let's proceed. Or have you run out of options, hm?"

"No, rest assured. We've finished assembly of the magically enhanced acoustic and directional energy weapons."

Until now, they've used a variety of things, though they can't say they've actually earned anything from them, until now.

Using the Mascot's scanning location to find out Puk Puck's position, they'll first attack her with sound waves.

First, they'll damage Puk Puck's semicircular canals, then, they'll power up the directional energy weapon with magical energy. This will form a high temperature force field. Using that, they'll bake Puk Puck alive.

The best part about these two weapons is that there's absolutely no way for them to be visible at all.

Even with the Three Sages' incredible abilities, if they can't see it, they can't do anything about it.

The only problems were that, after several tests, it was extremely hard to miniaturize these weapons and reassemble them. So that had to be solved.

3 Diamonds Shufflin were working like mules on top of those trucks, assembling those two weapons together.

If Puk Puck tried to defend herself by using her throwing stones, a Hearts Death Squad was prepared, placed in front of the weapon.

Until now, the problem of Puk Puck's throwing stones has finally been measured.

The power that Puk had when throwing those stones was unbelievable. However, these Hearts Shufflins should be able to withstand it for about 5 minutes.

Just 5 minutes. It's all they'll need.

A gigantic speaker, and a gigantic parabolic antenna. They placed these two large weapons on a dolly.

The high-ranking Hearts Shufflins were placed on its vanguards. The shielded hearts moved the dolly as fast as they walked, and rolled it towards the Plaza.

Finally, this is the end for Puk Puck.

Hammer's call was received. The switch was pushed...

...And all the Hearts Shufflins were blown away. Both the weapons blew up in succession. A high-speed aircraft was launched from within the ruins.

According to reports, the Magical Girl stationed in the ruins was no longer Puk Puck.

Before Hammer could respond, another bombardment strike was launched once more. The dolly was destroyed, the ground shook, and Magical Girls were crawling their bodies away from the Plaza.

☆ Pfile

Since it wasn't a good idea to constantly bombard the entrance to the ruins, the allied forces retreated.

Because of this, attacking has become rather difficult. Whatever attack they launch, whatever they throw at them, they had to first get to the entrance. If they stood at the entrance, then they'll be subjected to artillery fire.

The atmosphere's getting worse. Hammer and Lethe should be frustrated by now. They had to attack as soon as possible, but if they mess up, then they'll only feel frustration.

The Puck Faction's objective was known for sure. They can no longer leisurely play the long game.

With Puk Puck at the center, and the other Magical Girls as auxiliary units to protect the ruins, they were progressing well. But now, they weren't progressing well.

They'll probably have to switch to manual labor from now on. They didn't know how long they had, all they had was probably impatience.

So how will they transition?

Puk Puck was the hard target, and the other Magical Girls were the soft targets. To add to that, Shadow Gale's group should be hard at work trying to activate the Device. There's no reason they wouldn't consider them good targets as well.

Because of that possibility, Pfle had to move.

For Pfle to move in, the timing had to be right. She could take advantage of all the chaos and confusion. That was the right timing.

Pfle gave her instructions. She went over to the Magical Girl who could create metallic parts, *Metally*. She told her to create a big bomb looking object.

For Metally, who can only produce metal objects, she can't create the fully intricate mechanisms of an explosive. She couldn't even create the black powder necessary to blow it up.

"What do you want me to do with *this*?"

"Place it somewhere within sight of the Ruins."

"Are you sure that's okay?"

"We'll clean up quickly afterwards."

For Puk Puck, it would look like they had a gigantic bomb. From anyone looking at it, they would only see a large bomb.

It would seem like they're trying to blow up the Device along with the Ruins.

For the Osk Faction, the destruction of the Device is not an option. Even though they may head towards the Device, they wouldn't try to destroy it.

But Puk Puck would never be sure.

The outsiders within this mixed army had to think without delay. At last, Lethe had caught up to them. As long as it could be explained, she should allow it.

If she moved from Puk Puck, that's what Pfle wanted.

☆ Uluru

Although they seemed to be attacking with a lot of ingenuity, it didn't seem like they were doing too well. Every single attack had been repelled.

That's why Uluru was thinking hard.

Nope. She couldn't come up with any ideas.

Even though she was thinking and thinking, no ideas came out.

Uluru was frustrated, and she knew the reason why. She had been informed of what Puk Puck was going to do. All the Magical Girls she captured were going to be used for the Device as energy.

Before, she had thought,

Nothing Lady Puck does is ever wrong

Everything Puck did, Uluru would nod along. Now, Uluru didn't agree anymore. Uluru hated seeing people being used as energy. Because she hated it, she would take action. Because she took action, that meant that she was rebelling against the Puck Faction.

Because she hated it, she didn't want it.

Because she knew what was happening, she was frustrated.

She hit Mana.

"Why'd you fail that one time! No one's motivated now!"

"What, hey-"

Mana's eyelids were shivering slightly. In the middle of her words, she looked up. Uluru tried to ask more, but Mana moved her palms to Uluru. Mana placed her finger on Uluru's mouth.

"Quiet! Can you hear that?"

Uluru listened carefully. She could only hear the hustle and bustle of her surroundings. The shrubbery softly hitting the rocks, people talking, machinery moving, plastics and plastics hitting each other. Other than that-

...Uluru looked up. She thought it was the sound of the wind, but...

"Singing...? Is this..."

She heard a voice from far away, but it was very choppy. The more she tried to listen, the more it got closer.

The voice was being sung on a melody.

Multiple voices were overlapping each other, singing a song.

It was a chorus.

Uluru placed her hands on her ears, she only needed to hear a bit to remember what it was.

"IT'S THE CHOIR GROUP!"

Mana's face was dazed with admiration.

“Choir Group...? What... what’s that...?”

“They’re always singing for *everything* ! Birthdays, parties, you name it. They post it to video sites, and the leader of the chorus is Lady Puck!”

Uluru heard a very distinctive voice in the middle of the chorus, cutting through everyone else’s voices. It was closer in distance compared to the others.

It was a beautiful voice that passed through her ears. Uluru heard this voice.

It was like the whispers of the angels in heaven. Sweet and light. The feeling of her heart melting is slowly rising.

“THE TRUCK!”

Someone was shouting. When Uluru looked at the source, she saw the truck vibrating. She saw card soldiers looking through the truck windows. A light was being reflected on their faces.

“Inside the truck... Don’t listen to what’s inside the truck! The GPS has Puk’s video running on it!”

The card soldiers turned to face them. They removed their hands from their ears, their faces full of joy. They took out some maces from their hands.

“IF YOU DON’T LIE DOWN RIGHT NOW, LADY PUCK WILL DIE!”

Mana wasn’t fully troubled by Puk Puck dying, so even though she believed Uluru, she didn’t lie down.

The card soldiers on the truck all fell down.

The other card soldiers grabbed hold of the fallen ones.

A similar commotion was occurring elsewhere. The card soldiers that were watching the video on the truck were fighting the other soldiers that were fine.

The other card soldiers were seizing the enraged card soldiers.

Thump

A big sound was heard.

Uluru wanted to see what made that sound, but she was blocked by Mana who jumped on her.

“Don’t look! That was a sound from a monitor screen!”

They were trying to get everyone’s attention with a large monitor and a very loud sound. The turmoil increased. People were still fighting each other somewhere.

Uluru heard a voice in her head telling her to destroy the monitor. She turned towards the monitor while averting her eyes and slammed it with the butt of her rifle.

“PUK PUCK’S TRYING TO CONFUSE US!”

Someone was shouting. She remembered that voice.

“EVERYONE GET TO THE RUINS, NOW!”

She remembered the voice. Telling her that Puk Puck was coming, telling her to head to the ruins.

That was Pfle’s voice shouting out.

The Magical Girls who were waiting by the truck all ran off at once. At the front of the whole group, was a wheelchair travelling at tremendous speed.

Chapter 8: Charge into Battle

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

Confusion was rising. Hammer used her communications device, doing her best not to look at the GPS monitors on the trucks, destroying the large monitors as well, instructing the Shufflin IIs, some of whose hearts have been captivated, and so forth.

Lethe closed her eyes and headed towards the truck. They both knew from experimentation that Puk Puck's Magical Skill was effective through videos as well. Hammer too was once drawn to those videos.

But this time, the effect it was exuding was far more powerful.

While the video of Puk Puck playing from the truck was causing some major confusion, Pfle and her mercenaries ran off.

Of course, she never gave that order. It was something that Pfle decided for herself. Pfle wasn't the type to rush in for the sake of the army, either, and Hammer couldn't imagine that this was a moment of low self-control for her.

If she looks at it from the point of view of being an opportunity which was taken advantage of, then in that case, there's no way that they alone plan to stop Puk Puck. Even now, she similarly said that they should go together, as if she were the commander of the army.

Hammer was lost. In her confusion, the situation kept moving forward, she had no time to relax. She understood that, but she couldn't make up her mind.

While grabbing the mic of her equipment, she saw someone glaring at her. From her flank, was Lethe.

"Everyone, follow the mercenaries! Do not look at Puk Puck! Walk while looking at your feet or the sky!"

Hammer thought it was a bad idea, but at the same time, she thought it was the only possible idea.

The Shufflin II group ran first. Following them was Lethe's palanquin. Hammer too flew away and followed them.

"You okay?"

"From here on out, we need a plan. Get the mercenaries to keep Puk Puck busy, hm? In that chance, we'll send one, two, or more mercenary groups into the ruins, hm? If we can get an Ace of Spades in there, we can win."

"Understo... hm?"

As the dust cleared from the surrounding areas, the mercenary group that ran ahead broke to the right from the Ruins. They departed from the entrance of the Ruins where Puk Puck would be, running in the opposite direction, orbiting the Plaza.

They were running backwards. If they do this, the Shufflin II that was in their back would be pushed to the front, taking the brunt of the charge.

Pfle was taking a chance. She's doing her hardest to find opportunities in this hard push.

Lethe folded her fan, throwing it off the palanquin.

"Damn Human Resources! When this is over I want her interrogated!"

Lethe descended to the ground, and took the charge in front of the Shufflin IIs.

There was no mistaking this behavior. Shufflin II couldn't stop Puk Puck. If they approached her, they'd just be attracted to her.

That will only reduce their numbers, and add to the enemy's. That will only help the Puck Faction further.

The only one that could stop Puk Puck is Lethe.

"Shufflin II, buy her some time!"

Although Hammer wasn't with Lethe, she could easily speak as if she was there. Hammer used her mic, and gave instructions to all the Shufflin II.

They were approaching the ruins. Puk Puck would be there. They averted their eyes so as to not look at her, but they didn't notice something before it was too late.

From the ruins, another Magical Girl besides Puk Puck appeared. She carried some kind of equipment. A large monitor.

She turned on the power, and gradually a picture began to take form.

A beautiful singing voice started playing. When Hammer heard it, she looked away from the monitor.

"Don't look at the monitor! Puk Puck's video is being played!"

☆ Puk Puck

Puk Puck decided not to move from the entrance to the Ruins. If she made the wrong move, she'll give a chance for the enemy to head inside.

The entrance was about 4 meters long, and 3 meters wide. If she stayed put, then no one could get in without seeing her.

Not to mention, there were many Magical Girls that were trying to ignore Puk Puck. That fact made Puk Puck sad.

The card soldiers were staring at their feet, not looking at the Ruins entrance while running towards it.

Puk Puck approached one of the card soldiers running ahead. Just before they hit her.

Pinch

She pulled the cheeks of that soldier. With a surprised look, the soldier looked forward, and Puk was able to befriend her in the blink of an eye.

"Hey, Miss Card Soldier, would you please help me out? Could you stop those people trying to get into the Ruins?"

In order to make Puk Puck's wish come true, the soldier turned around to her former allies, grasping a spear in her right hand.

Although she only increased her friends by one person, this Card Soldier had a huge number on her.

"One by one, you should slowly increase your friends"

That was what Snow White had told her.

Although she was a bit disappointed, she decided to let her dance videos handle the Card Soldiers.

The Magical Girls were running towards the ruins, looking at their feet the whole time. Even if they could reach the entrance of the Ruins, when they enter, they'll come face to face with Puk's strongest friend.

The Magical Girl Hunter, Snow White.

Something flew from the corner of her eyes. Puk Puck looked towards it. It was an angel with a communication device, flying low enough that she could touch her.

"CQ Angel Hammer is the one in charge of commanding the Shufflins. She's a priority target"

That was what Snow White had told her.

Even though she was flying, if her wings are broken, she'll crash down. Puk Puck picked up the stones in her feet. Before she could throw it, however, she was stopped.

"And just what do you think you plan to do when the enemy general comes, hm?"

Just before she threw the stone at Hammer, she heard a voice. The ground shook, she lost her balance and fell down.

A lady with an extremely dazzling Plantagenet style, painted all over her sheath, was standing in front of her.

The lady's appearance attracted Puk Puck's eyes more than any other Magical Girl. And this Magical Girl's name...

...General.

That could only mean this was Lethe.

Lethe looked at Puk Puck without diverting her eyes. She listened to Puk Puck without covering her ears. Yet, she isn't becoming Puk Puck's friend.

She was just standing there, by herself.

There were screams and anger coming out from the Plaza. Everyone who was watching Puk Puck's video outside praised her as "Beautiful" and "Cute".

Now, it was a popular trending song. Before that, she was singing a Nursery Rhyme.

Lethe was right in front of Puk Puck. Yet, Lethe had not succumbed to Puk Puck. Because of that, Puk Puck's curiosity rose.

This was going to be exciting, her heart was thumping.

Lethe was standing near a place where Puk could easily reach her if she stretched her arms. Puk Puck took a step forward, yet she was still far away.

She took a second step, a third step.

Yet, she still couldn't reach Lethe. When she thought about that, she turned around. She saw one of the card soldiers, entering the Ruins.

She was being lured out. She hurriedly got back to the entrance. However, no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't reach the entrance. She couldn't reach it even if she reached out.

Lethe's Magical Skill. Puk Puck thought back to it. She turned to face Lethe. Lethe laughed as she looked towards Puk Puck, unsheathing the sword from her black sheath.

"Ame-no-Ohabari"

The moment she pulled out her the sword, the air tightened like pins. Puk Puck breathed out.

The black sheath on her left hand, and the sword on her right hand isn't a normal sword. It's a Magical Sword.

It's so beautiful... Ah... I want her to be my friend...

Of course, Puk Puck had an obligation to her friends, so that they'd work hard. She wasn't blind.

The flow of air distorted when the Magical Sword was pulled out. The singing voice of Puk Puck that flowed from behind Lethe sounded choppy. It became smaller, until it finally disappeared.

It was as if she was taken far away. It was an unnatural feeling.

Lethe approached closer, the flow following her. Puk Puck fell backwards. Lethe's feet movements were hidden by her long skirt. Normally, Puk Puck wouldn't care about such things, but right now, Puk Puck cared about the movements of Lethe's legs.

Yet, she still felt so pleasant.

Puk Puck spread out her hands wide and laughed.

“Leeethe! Let's be friends!”

Her reply was a slash, downhill from the top. A sword raised from the ground, adding strikes with each blow.

She twisted her body as she sliced.

Puk Puck deduced each of them one by one. The flowing stroking motion, she smoothly followed it, like a ballroom dance, she could avoid the attacks if she followed her partner's movements.

She dodged, she laughed, she talked,

“Hey, c'mon! Let's be friends! It'll be really fun!”

Lethe's skirt rose as she launched a kick to Puk Puck. Puk Puck reached out with her right palm and grabbed it. She wanted to twist her opponent's ankle, but she grabbed into nothing but empty space.

“Huh?”

She knew something seemed strange. This was so different from usual.

Lethe fired 3 consecutive attacks, all blocked or avoided. Puk Puck kicked the stone pebbles near her feet, intending to hit Lethe, but the Pebbles lost their momentum and fell to the ground before they hit her.

Every stone she kicked and threw couldn't hit her. Even though she wanted to reach her, she couldn't touch her.

Lethe should be right there, but it was as if she was somewhere far away.

Lethe swung her swords fluidly. She saw one, two, three strokes at once. No, that wasn't an illusion, it was the truth. The edges were divided into three parts.

As she avoided the fluttering blades, it seemed like they were inviting her. Puk Puck wanted to touch them, but she endured the impulse.

She waited, and finally, she caught it.

The first blade she caught between her thumb and forefinger. The second between her middle and ring finger. The third blade she caught with her ring and pinky finger.

Lethe tried to push the blade, she tried to pull it, she loosened the blade, she gripped it tight, but Puk Puck stopped all attempts and didn't let go.

Puk Puck put her face close to the blade. Her face was already touching it. She wanted to touch it. She felt the power compelling her to touch it become stronger.

If she were an ordinary Magical Girl, she would've already stabbed herself with the sword.

Sniff, sniff

Puk Puck smelled the sword. It had a weak scent. As she thought, it was actually located far away. That's why Lethe wasn't becoming Puk Puck's friend.

"C'mon, let's be friends! Let's stop fighting! Let's play together! It'll be really fun! I've got a lot of friends back there. I'm sure we'll all get along."

Lethe let go of her sword, and jumped backwards from Puk Puck.

“Ame-no-Habakiri !”

Lethe reached out somewhere far away, and a sword appeared in her hand. It was different from the previous one.

From the thick blade, several branching blades were growing.

“Ame-no-Taboko !”

Another one. This time, the third one was a spear. The blade, that was about half as long as the hilt seemed to harness the power of Dharma itself. It seems to have fortified itself into a shape of high density.

Just by being there, she could feel its energy, making a roaring sound. It surely was a weapon with a great name. The Osk Faction must have plenty in their treasury.

Lethe had a sword in her right hand, and a spear in her left. She was standing there slightly half-heartedly. Blood was dripping down the edge of her mouth. However, she focused on Puk Puck.

Puk Puck looked at the sword in her hand. It flowed almost as weakly as paper. It was going to be troublesome to carry it, so she threw it away behind her.

Lethe thrusted her spear, and Puk dodged it. She swung her sword, and Puk also dodged that.

But the sword flew close to her body, and her shin was slashed. Although the sword never touched her, she felt the cold steel of the blade.

Puk Puck saw the ripped ribbons of her socks fluttering in the background, creating a discontinuity between her feet. She felt sad about that.

Until now, Lethe’s face hadn’t changed. But now, she began to slightly distort her facial expression.

“What’s wrong, Lethe? Are you relieved because Puk didn’t get hurt as bad? Aw, you really *don’t* wanna hurt me, do you?”

Lethe is a Magical Girl with strength. Her accuracy, her speed, her power, her skill, her reflexes, her agility, her strength.

Every factor of her far exceeded any standards. She kept away from Puk Puck's Magical Skill. The weapon that she pulled towards her hand was also a first-class Magical Item. She had confidence in herself.

That's why she chose to face off against Puk Puck alone. With her strength and her magical blades, she would be able to do the impossible.

Yet, she still couldn't cut her. It's not that Puk Puck used her magic, nor was it because of Lethe's skill. It was all too simple.

The Three Sages' bodies.

Power, Speed, Durability.

No matter who it was, they would exceed it.

Lethe wasn't far from Puk Puck.

"Hey, Lethe"

Puk Puck moved forward. Lethe took a step back. Blood continued to flow from the edge of Lethe's lips.

Puk Puck hasn't even touched Lethe, let alone attacked her. She noticed why it was flowing. Lethe had been chewing her cheeks and her tongue.

Inside Lethe, her cracks are beginning to spread.

Puk Puck was sad. She wanted to befriend Lethe's heart, but she didn't want to be forced to fight her. Everyone hated that.

Puk Puck hated that.

Lethe hated that.

That's why, Puk Puck should use her magic on the cracks inside Lethe's heart. Yes, that's a good idea.

"If we become friends, It'll be super suupper fun! No matter if anyone blames you, I'll never get mad at you. So, please, be Puk's friend? If we be friends, we can play tag, we can play hide and seek, we can play lots

of things! I've got lots of sweets, and juices, you can drink coffee and tea, too!"

Puk Puck further stepped forward.

☆ Lethe

Lethe had once tasted the effects of Puk Puck's powers before, but now it seems much stronger compared to back then.

It was a decade ago.

She had been called to a meeting with Puk Puck. Eventually, she became Puk Puck's playmate. She played tag with her, and played hide and seek with her. From deep down in her heart, she had so much fun.

When she remembered how much fun she had, she felt humiliated.

That evening, she found out about Puk Puck. She hadn't realized that she was being enchanted by Puk Puck's Magical Skill.

She had been played like a fool.

All the fun she had.

When she separated from Puk Puck, all she could feel was sorrow.

Now, Puk Puck was using far stronger magic than last time. The current victims of her magic have far passed the stage of simply feeling favorable towards Puk Puck.

Faith.

Blindness.

If it's for Puk Puck's sake, they were willing to do anything. They were willing to throw away their own lives. Whatever she wanted, they would fulfill.

It wasn't like how she normally was. Back during that meeting, Puk Puck wasn't being serious at all.

Lethe always kept her distance using her own Magical Skill. This was to minimize the effect of Puk Puck's Magical Skill.

Still, it couldn't be completely nullified. Puk Puck's magic was like a snake venom that was slowly eroding Lethe from the outside.

The swords that she took out from her treasure vault. None of their reinforced strength ad magic was effective at all.

If you used them to cut a Homunculus, it would be sharp enough to turn them into dark black stains. Not only that, it had the ability to "*Absorb the souls of those injured by the blade*".

Yet the Three Sages' bodies could endure it.

In an effort to injure Puk Puck, she had to narrow her distance with her. As a result of that, she had been burned badly by Puk Puck's magic.

Her brain felt like it was turning inside out, yet she kept her senses together.

Lethe was a One-Man Army Magical Girl. She wasn't inferior, even against the Mao School Magical Girls.

Yet, the Magical Girl in front of her had a gap that was far different to her own strength.

Her body, her power, her skill, her magic, her willpower. All of them seemed like it came from another dimension.

Due to that, she felt stressed. The feeling of stress only made it easier for the poison of Puk Puck's magic to penetrate her.

Puk Puck was looking more and more gorgeous. She seems so attractive.

Lethe could use her magic to bypass Puk Puck from her side, can't she? Then she could enter the Ruins.

No, that's impossible.

As soon as she got near Puk Puck, everything would be over.

She could use her magic on Puk Puck. Shoot her up sky high, can't she?

No, that's impossible.

If she targeted Puk Puck directly, then she'd immediately be attracted to her once again. Plus, there's a limit as to how much she can affect the terrain around Puk Puck with her magic.

Moreover, if Puk Puck was her opponent, Lethe never expected to be able to last long. When the time comes, she would choose to run.

But if worse comes to worse, if she became attracted to Puk Puck, then she might become a Prisoner of War, to be negotiated back to the Osk Faction.

But then...

Puk Puck's plan flashed into her head, and all of her options were blown away. If Puk Puck activated the Device, then all will be over.

What Lethe should do now is buy time.

Buy time for Hammer, for Pfle, for the Shufflins to reach the Device.

The best way to earn time was self-explanatory. Eliminating Puk Puck would grant them all the time in the world.

Lethe chewed her cheeks. She noticed the pain and taste of iron in her mouth.

Thrusting with a spear, dodged.

Piercing with a sword, dodged.

She couldn't shorten the distance. Even Puk Puck understood that. She kept her distance, her body at a stance.

One step, she put out her right foot. Just from stepping down, it was enough to crack the bedrock.

Her right arm.

Her waist.

Her shoulder.

Her knees.

Her calves.

Everywhere was surging with power. Lethe looked at the sky, she had a spear.

She didn't aim it at Puk Puck, but she aimed it at the ground instead.

At the same time, Lethe furthered her distance with the spear, moving herself to the top of the clouds.

In this separate world, there is neither atmosphere nor space. Her spears flew everywhere.

Lethe saw Puk Puck having a strange expression on her face. She didn't know what Puk Puck was planning to do. She didn't know, but she prayed.

Lethe thrusted using the two swords in her hands. Cutting through the air. Returning back down.

This barrage of attacks launched at high speed with murderous intent would be her *finishing blow*.

The distance that she had. It began to shrink. The blood that dripped from her mouth had begun to stain her dress. But it's not over yet.

The sword strike she was piercing with, she continued to push through. Puk Puck tried to dodge, but Lethe timed her attack.

The area they're in, everything was perfect. Although it was only for a moment, she saw Puk Puck's legs lift off the ground.

Puk Puck wasn't a Magical Girl who could fly. Which means, she shouldn't be able to move freely in the air.

Lethe shortened the distance between the spear in the sky and the ground below. All around her, she adjusted the distance, putting Puk Puck in a penetrating position.

She wouldn't be affected by Puk Puck's magic this way, because this was different from a direct hit with Lethe.

The spear that was falling from a high altitude accelerated with a furious momentum, drawn only by gravity.

This was an unavoidable blow. She's going to hit Puk Puck, whose feet had jumped off the ground.

That's right. She was going to hit her.

Lethe reflexively shortened the distance to Puk Puck.

The spear that fell from the heavens bounced off of Puk Puck's body, and it pierced through Lethe's own body.

Blood shot through the sky. The blood loss was overwhelming. Lethe fell downwards and collapsed sideways.

The instant that she protected Puk Puck, Lethe felt despair.

But at the same time, she also felt delight.

Puk Puck, who looked down at Lethe, had a sad expression on her face.

You should smile more...

Lethe tried to say out loud. But only blood was flowing through her mouth, not words.

Puk Puck walked away, leaving Lethe alone. Lethe stroked her chest with her trembling hands. She felt the blood that flew from the sky.

Her pleasure gradually disappeared. Instead, she felt anger and hatred instead.

Until the very end, until the end... Lethe had been caught by Puk Puck's magic, and thus the final blow that she wanted to deliver to Puk Puck was instead delivered to herself.

She couldn't believe how stupid and foolish she was.

She was about to die.

She'd protected Puk Puck, and in doing so, filled herself with regret.

Regret continued to spiral within her chest. Gradually, she was losing her life. If Lethe didn't have the life force of a Magical Girl, she would've been dead by now. However, even with her superior life force, she couldn't live forever.

She couldn't rush to her subordinates, who were surely in trouble right now.

Her consciousness is fading, the sounds she heard became distant, her visibility was distorted.

Within that distorted vision, she saw a blue figure approaching her from the distance.

The blue figure touched Lethe's cheek. Something rolled out of there. All the hatred and despair that she felt suddenly disappeared.

Lethe was released from all of her negative feelings.

She smiled peacefully.

She was out of time.

☆ CQ Angel Hammer

If they don't attack here, then everything will be wasted.

The best-case scenario was that Lethe wins against Puk Puck. But if it were that easy, then Lethe would've come out from the beginning.

The worst-case scenario, Lethe becomes attracted to Puk Puck. They had to complete their mission before something like that happens.

Hammer didn't want to be targeted from the ground. As she flew at a low attitude, she observed her enemies movements.

There were so many things that she had to announce. Hammer placed her communication device's microphone to her mouth.

Don't look at the monitors. Even if 10 people are sacrificed, all it'll take is 1 person entering the Ruins. Run at full power. Don't stop even if your

allies are in danger. Even though it was tiring to say those things, she had to say it.

Even though they wanted to sacrifice as little as possible, they had almost no choice. While they didn't assume that Puk Puck herself would join the fight, she didn't want many of her troops to be sacrificed.

The Plaza had become bad.

If you looked over there, or even if you looked over here, large monitors and speakers were being installed in sets. Hammer quickly looked away. She could see the peaceful faces of the Shufflin II that she imagined were blissfully staring into the monitors.

Puk Puck's Magical Girls weren't just people who installed the monitors and speakers. Against the defenseless Shufflin II who closed their ears and only looked at the ground as they ran, they'd attack them without mercy.

Whether it's spraying them with Assault Rifles, blasting them with destructive rays, or hooking their legs, or divekicking their knees as they pass by.

As soon as Shufflin II tries to fight back, they would all retreat behind one of the large monitors. From there, the Shufflin II that chases them would see the video, and stop at their feet.

While fighting without fear, the Shufflins kicked down Puk Puck's Magical Girls, entering the ruins, though there were some exceptions, such as the Ace of Spades, who weren't allowed to go in. There were around 10 of them that rushed in, but Hammer couldn't tell if the outcome was commendable.

Hammer shouted into her mic with her dry voice.

"The Device should be at the end of the ruins! Don't break it! Do not destroy it! We have to *stop* the ritual!"

While she spoke, she felt a bitter taste in her tongue. Why were we sacrificing lives now? Is it necessary for those that left them to keep holding on to what garbage they have?

In the first place, before Lady Puck ever took action, if she could disassemble the Device, she would've filled the entire Ruins. But since she can't, it has to be like this. Hammer couldn't reverse her orders, so she shook off that bitter taste in her tongue.

"If we manage to stop the enemy's plans! Even if *every one* of us gets brainwashed, we still win!"

Hammer dodged a head-sized rock aimed at her head by twirling in the air. Just in time, she kicked one of the monitors. She flew half-way upwards, her body trying to get as close to the ground as possible.

As she was doing that, and her body was floating upwards and downwards, she caught the Magical Phone that dropped. From that Magical Phone, a stereoscopic Mascot Character appeared.

As they were thrown straight into the battlefield, even Hammer realized that they would easily stand out.

"Can you do anything?"

"I don't know what I can do to help, Pon!"

"You're a Cyber Fairy! Hijack the monitors and switch off those dance videos the Shufflin IIs are watching!"

"I can't, Pon!"

"What do you mean you can't!? You're the *Magical Girl Hunter's* Cyber Fairy!"

"I need my Master, Pon! I can't hijack these kinds of things without a Master's authorization, Pon! Cyber Fairies aren't allowed to have their own independence anymore! Not after what's happened before, Pon!"

"Damn Mascots! You're useless!"

"Shitty Osk Faction! Thinking you can get everything for free, Pon!"

Hammer restrained her urge to rip off the Magical Phone's batteries. While she was arguing, she looked at her surroundings, while flying acrobatically.

It was Hammer's job to suggest that "This was a better plan" in the first place. While she was exposed to arrows being fired at her, dodging and avoiding them all, the number of enemies kept on increasing.

This is because until just a few minutes ago, many of her allies had already converted to the enemy's side.

At this rate, there's no way to escape.

Unlike the Ace of Spades, she didn't have the strength to power through them all. Hammer kept her head facing forward. This time without the emotional anger she had last time. This time, she talked to Fal in a more rational voice.

"Your stereoscopic image! You can project things other than your own body, right? Can you project what's behind me?"

"I can project it, yeah, Pon!"

"Okay, how realistic will it be?"

"The projection will seem genuine, Pon!"

"Then I need you to do one thing for me"

"What is it, Pon?"

Hammer gradually dropped her altitude, bumping her shoulder to a rock wall, trying to damage herself as little as possible. Although she did her best to do as little damage to herself as possible, there was still some damage that she felt, and it was a bit more painful than she thought, but it didn't matter.

On her right hand, she held a Magical Phone that she grasped tightly.

Hammer had struck the rock wall, tumbling down as pieces of gravel scattered around her. She rolled her body, she groaned as she stood up. And right before her, was a giant monitor. Hammer stopped standing, and looked towards that monitor's screen.

"ALL FOR LADY PUCK! BANZAI!!!"

Even in this fierce battle, it was easy to find people who weren't yet devoted to Puk Puck.

Those who were covering her eyes, those who looked down unnaturally, those who weren't full of happiness.

Those who were enamored with Puk Puck would only attack the ones who weren't, and would show Puk Puck's videos to them.

Hammer understood that quickly. She asked Fal to project an image of Hammer's joyful face onto her, covering up her real face. By doing that, Hammer was able to cheat Puk Puck.

It's like those times in the movies, when someone would pretend to be a zombie by moving, moaning, and acting like a zombie. That was Hammer's plan now.

Although she escaped the current crisis, she still has yet to solve the bigger problem. She still had to enter the Ruins somehow. What's going to happen then?

She hopes the timing will be right.

As she pretended to be a zombie, all Hammer could do was pray to the attacking Shufflin II, pray for the safety of those who had successfully entered the Ruins, pray that the ritual could be stopped.

Speaking of which, she couldn't see where Pfle and her team, or Mana and Uluru went. Were they able to enter the Ruins before Hammer arrived in the Plaza, or did they fail in their attempt?

Hammer prayed for their safety and success.

☆ Uluru

"I'm a spy of Lady Puck! I've infiltrated the Osk Faction! Now I'm coming back! Lady Puck told you all to show me the inside of the Ruins!"

Uluru thought that if she would throw these lies towards the Magical Girls under Puk Puck, who had attacked from the Plaza all the way to the trucks, that they would believe her.

But it didn't look like they were listening to her.

Uluru lied down to avoid their attacks, jumped up, ran off, and avoided any enemies.

The Puck Faction would know about Uluru beforehand. Of course, they'd already have prepared measures against her. They would easily be able to nullify Uluru using earplugs.

Uluru cursed her Magical Skill's weakness. Still, she couldn't run away.

Mana got closer to Uluru, but Uluru couldn't even rely on *her* either. She's not a Magical Girl, she's a Mage.

While Mana saw Pfle lead her Magical Girls into battle, she injected something into her own neck. Uluru had heard it was some kind of medicine that made your body and reflexes better.

But, this wasn't so that she could fight these Magical Girls. She needed her body to increase in strength so that she could avoid their attacks.

There was nothing they could do but dive under the trucks, and while taking advantage of any gaps, they avoided their enemies swinging their coshes and batons.

Uluru shouted,

"I'm Lady Puck's ally! The ones who betrayed Lady Puck are attacking me!"

Her voice won't reach those who wear earplugs. But the ones who didn't wear them would hear Uluru's shouting. Meaning, the Magical Girls who were attracted by Puk Puck just now would hear Uluru's voice.

The Card Soldiers stopped in their tracks, and ran towards Uluru. They hit the baton carrying Magical Girls in the back.

"I'm Lady Puck's ally! The ones who are betraying Lady Puck are attacking me!"

Uluru continued calling out. The Card Soldiers, whether they were Spades, Diamonds, Clubs, or Hearts, all were shuffled. From their chaotic behavior, they became a controlled flock.

They began attacking the Magical Girls. Uluru kicked the Magical Girls who were attacked from behind and ran away.

Trapped from front and back, those Magical Girls were kicked, beaten up, and lied on the ground.

A Card Soldier raised her spear up towards a fallen Magical Girl.

“Lady Puck says you can leave them be!” shouted Uluru. With no complaints, the Card Soldiers stopped beating up the fallen Magical Girls.

Uluru looked at Mana, and Mana looked back at Uluru. Uluru nodded.

“Lady Puck’s orders! You’re to escort us to the Ruins!”

Once you’re attracted to Puk Puck, then there was no way to be further attracted to her. The Card Soldiers who were attracted won’t stop to look at Puk Puck’s videos anymore.

Uluru held Mana’s hand. Mana grasped Uluru’s hand tighter. The Magical Girl and the Mage, surrounded by their Card Soldiers. Together, they ran across the Plaza.

At the corner of the Plaza, even with Uluru’s eyes, there was something that she couldn’t quite catch. Two things were colliding at extreme speed. They were entangled within the dust. Moving way too fast for her to register.

Even though Uluru couldn’t confirm it visually, she knew that one of them was Puk Puck.

Acting for Lady Puck. Living for Lady Puck. Dying for Lady Puck. Uluru used to only think about that. But now, surprisingly, all of her thoughts of Puk Puck began to fade away.

It’s not that Uluru’s memory of Puk Puck began to thin, it would probably be more correct to say that... Nothing Puk Puck is doing could reach out to Uluru.

She would do anything for Lady Puck, if only Lady Puck were...

Uluru remembered memories of her past, and didn’t let go.

At the Amusement Park, she bought every one of them some soft cream. She wiped off the soft cream from Sachiko's face, and she cleaned up any smudges herself.

She played tag, hide and seek, sports, that one bread eating competition that always left crumbs that Uluru hated. Everywhere in Uluru's memories, she remembered Puk Puck.

Uluru tightly closed her eyes, when she opened them, she only looked forward. She had told herself to just run.

When she held Mana's hand, Mana would do the same thing. If Uluru grasped it tightly, Mana would hold on tighter. Uluru held on tightly, and Mana strengthened her grip.

Uluru shouted,

"Anyone that attacks us is because they're all traitors!"

The 3 of Hearts was engulfed in flames. The 6 of Clubs was bitten by invisible fangs. The 8 of Clubs grabbed another Clubs and rolled to the ground. The Ace of Spades blocked a Magical Girl that tried to attack them, throwing her away when she skewered the Ace's body.

That Magical Girl was someone Mana knew. Uluru also knew her. It was one of Uluru's seniors in Puck Manor. When Uluru was still getting settled there, at nighttime, that girl would always cook her rice balls.

A Magical Girl was being thrown up high, flown backwards. Uluru gritted her teeth. What she was about to do, she'll never forget it in her life.

Uluru grasped Mana's hand. Mana grasped Uluru's hand tighter.

☆ Shadow Gale

If one thing has gone well, then they move on to the next one, and the next one, and the next one, that's just how they would work.

The flow was proceeding smoothly. It seems that finally, it felt like Shadow Gale and the others were all working together.

They had solved the Device's Password. It had regarded the Password solver as an ally, and since she was an ally, the Device allowed her inside. Thus, the barrier was lifted. Work proceeded without delay.

The seals, the armor, the password, the barrier. Finally, they could see the inside. From here, Shadow Gale's main work can begin.

A Magical Girl who used Engraving Magic marked the Device with spots designated for Shadow Gale to use her wrench on to remodel.

Although Shadow Gale had never seen these parts before in her life, it wasn't a big problem for her. Shadow Gale was never really good with machines, so a lot of people wondered why she was gifted with magic involving remodeling.

Pessimistically, she thought it was probably because it was to remodel that tyrant's wheelchair. But this was not so.

For Puk Puck, for the world, for the Land of Magic, for all the Magical Girls, in order to remodel the equipment, Shadow Gale was gifted this Magical Skill.

She was proud, she was thankful, she was delighted. She shook her wrench, turning the spanners around. Every single time she did that, she felt she would shine even brighter.

The monitors displayed Puk Puck dancing. The speakers endlessly played her adorable singing voice. This was the best work environment. The murky environment was a thing of the past. Now, no one was arguing, no one was clicking their tongues, no one disagreed at all.

It was fun, without any exceptions.

While drowning in the pleasure of serving their greatest leader, Puk Puck. While uniting together to achieve the goal of completing the Device. They felt the weight of the world upon their shoulders.

Usually, if they were living their idle lives, they may have been crushed by the weight of that world. But now, it's different.

Puk Puck was on the monitors, she's watching over us .

Shadow Gale had a duty, she didn't want to make Puk Puck sad.

She could see the end. Soon. Just a bit more. 1 hour. 30 minutes. She might even be able to complete it in 5 minutes if she-

...The singing voice stopped.

Shadow Gale and the other Magical Girls looked at the monitors. They still had Puk Puck's lovely dance playing on them. Even under this rubble, Puk Puck kept dancing without stopping. It was very symbolic.

The monitors were still moving, but the speakers were all silent.

Shadow Gale had to focus on the Device. Everyone else knew that too. However, because the speakers stopped playing Puk Puck's singing voice, her heart was distorted.

It was true that her voice improved concentration. More importantly, without her singing voice, it was hard to withstand the environment. Until a while ago, the silence seemed natural, but now, it was unnatural.

The Magical Girls stood up to see the speakers, but before they could see anything, the speaker made a *pop* noise. Then, a Magical Girl's voice came out.

"The Osk Faction has invaded! Everyone be careful!"

After saying that, once more, Puk Puck's singing voice began to flow from the speakers. The Magical Girls' hearts all relaxed.

Everyone looked away at the speaker's disturbing news. What were the intruders coming in for? But there was no need to explain that. They wanted to interfere with the ritual.

One of the Magical Girls stood upright.

"Work hard everyone! I won't let anything disturb you all!"

The other Magical Girls also stood one by one.

"We're going to end it all! We'll have a world where Magical Girls don't have to fight each other anymore! A world free of conflict!"

"For the new world! For Lady Puck!"

Shadow Gale stood up as well.

“FOR LADY PUCK!”

“THAT’S RIGHT! FOR LADY PUCK!!!”

Sometimes, they would argue with each other. Sometimes, there was jealousy among them. However, now they only had one thought.

For Puk Puck’s sake. For Puk Puck’s sake.

All the Magical Girls formed a circle and extended their right hands to one big pile. Then they shouted out. Raising them at the same time.

It was time to get back to work.

Chapter 9: The Magical Girl Hunter

☆ Pfle

The closest thing to the best situation has been created. Because Lethe fought Puk Puck, she provided a path for everyone to head into the Ruins. At the same time, Lethe's position as commander was taken away.

So long as Lethe planned to assassinate Shadow Gale, she had no choice. If Lethe couldn't give the order, then no one would be able to.

After that, Pfle had to get to the Ruins before the Osk Faction. She had to reach the Device's chambers before anyone else did. She had to stop Shadow Gale without killing her.

Puk Puck's purpose is clear, and the Osk Faction has run out of options. This is fine.

Although this was the best situation to be in, that doesn't mean she was optimistic. She's gotten this far through effort and luck. From now, she's going to need more effort and luck.

Pfle's wheelchair was accelerating, sticking to the right side of the Plaza walls. While she scraped those walls, the wheelchair ran horizontally from the ground, away from the dense areas of the monitors.

From her wheelchair, she fired laser beams that destroyed the monitors. Explosions and fire raged on the monitors. Beyond them, the mercenaries were following Pfle's lead.

Lethe had lured Puk Puck away from the entrance of the Ruins. Their appearance looked as if they were both far away. Pfle could barely recognize them. It's safe to go now.

From the ruins were Magical Girls carrying monitors. Pfle confirmed it when she saw their distant forms. Something vague was reflected on that monitor. Pfle didn't need to look further. She could already guess what was being reflected.

The Shufflins that looked at the monitors stopped looking down at their feet. It was only a matter of time before they turned their spears to their former faction.

Pfle closed her eyes, and put her wheelchair on autopilot. When stray bullets flew towards her, her wheelchair's interceptors managed to block them. It would be a difficult use of her Magical Wheelchair to get her to where she wanted to go.

To have a Wheelchair that can go at breakneck speeds. That Magical Skill was far too simple, and didn't seem to match her personality, according to Mamori. She didn't realize that it was this simple magic that made it easy to use.

In addition, Mamori's Magical Skill had always improved her wheelchair.

Complaints. Displeasure. While Mamori never stopped complaining to her, she always improved Pfle's wheelchair as the days went on. Although Mamori wouldn't admit it, in time, she became attached to remodeling Pfle's wheelchair. Without Pfle even telling her to, Mamori would suggest new remodeling plans. Both for convenience and for combat ability. Now, her wheelchair was far enhanced compared to her original performance.

Pfle's wheelchair was strengthened, evolved thanks to Mamori's Magical Skill, and was now unwillingly on full display.

Pfle could feel the death beams that she fired from her wheelchair. When she was on unpaved ground, her wheelchair shook with every shot. She stopped, reversed, headed back, overcoming something, and accelerated once more.

Despite its insane movements, its passenger was never flung away. That was due to magic.

Furthermore, as she fired her death beams, Pfle felt her cheeks getting hotter, the burning smell on the tips of her hair piercing her nose. In the same direction, cold wind blew, and soft snow attached itself to her eyelids.

Catching up to her wheelchair, Princess Deluge was supporting Pfle from the sides. Dark Cutie was also probably following her somewhere. Those two are capable Magical Girls.

Her wheelchair was also capable. Like a living creature, it drifted, rapidly braked, and accelerated. It climbed the cliffs and ran down. A knife seemed to have cut part of her hair. It was the greatest damage she'd endured so far.

Pfle called out to her mercenaries.

"We have trouble! Everyone focus on getting yourselves to the Ruins!"

After speaking those words, Pfle had a thought. These weren't orders.

Although these were instructions that weren't ordered, none of the Magical Girls complained. From behind, the footsteps began to overtake the wheelchair, headed towards the Ruins. While entrusting them to work silently, Pfle clung to her wheelchair's armrests.

☆ Snow White

The enemy has broken through the defense line. Invading the Ruins one after the other. That meant that Puk Puck was unable to suppress the enemies.

Snow White was holding back her feelings to rush towards Puk Puck's side. For Puk Puck's sake, she'll do her best at the position she was stationed in. That's what would please Puk Puck the most.

Armor Arlie, Blade Brenda, Cannon Catherine. The three of them has been deployed to Puk Puck's aid. Snow White's role was to give them the appropriate instructions. However, that role had already collapsed. Puk Puck had entered battle alone. The others didn't approach. Therefore, Snow White and the 3 Black Magical Girls will move on their own.

30 Meters from the Entrance, they attempted to intercept the 3-way fork. They fought the Ace of Spades, even if she stabbed back, Armor Arlie didn't collapse. She took the damage, and where the armor was

broken, the Ace pierced it without mercy. But Arlie won't fall. From where the damage was dealt, black goo covered up the wounds. Stronger and heavier armor formed to support her.

She was fighting the Ace of Spades by herself, but the others are having a somewhat easier time.

Blade Brenda sliced her opponent's thrown spear into eight pieces, Cannon Catherine shot her *Magical Cannon* towards the enemies in a narrow passageway. The Shufflins were blown away by the Black Magical Girls, bouncing off the narrow ceiling aisles and walls.

Unfortunately, the Ace of Spades jumped out through the smoldering smoke. This was different from Arlie's responsibilities. Multiple Aces were invading the Ruins. Snow White frowned. It'll be more difficult if more enemies show up.

The Aces were difficult to see and they were rushing with full speed. They threw spears that pierced the air. Brenda deflected them with her sword, and pinned them to the ground. They followed up a second time. Catherine dove her cannon to the ground and pushed up against the spears. Snow White moved to cover. She caught a weapon with her arms, with a shock that almost made them numb. She dropped the dangerous weapon.

The rising Brenda took a slash from behind, the black blade was grabbed by her bare hands, deflected by a turning kick.

Snow White took advantage of that chance and thrusted with her weapon, the Ace of Spades turned around and shook her spear. The Ace raised the spear towards Snow White, whose balance had collapsed, but she stopped.

Snow White held her right hand in front of her face. On her hand was a Magical Phone. On the screen was an image of Puk Puck dancing. She handed the Magical Phone to the Ace, who obediently accepted it as her eyes were fixed to the screen.

If someone has seen 30 seconds of the video, then they would befriend Puk Puck. The they would probably attack their former allies.

At the edge of her vision, Snow White saw Brenda helping Catherine up as her eyes moved towards the entrance. The sound was getting larger, they were getting closer. She could read the minds of not only Lady Puck. The voices of other Magical Girls were mixed as well.

Puk Puck couldn't prevent it, new opponents were increasing rapidly. In this side also, mercenary Magical Girls were gathered and intercepting. On the other side were non-Shufflin Magical Girls.

Will they head for support here, or intercept the enemies who have failed? Snow White suddenly heard clearly. From there, she listened carefully to the voice that she had to hear, and she opened her eyes and started running. Brenda and Catherine kept silent without any doubt.

Inside the Ruins, it was a complicated maze, the overall map was drawn inside her head. Snow White took the shortest distance to the innermost Ruins, running through the passageways.

Before the Device Installation chamber, there was a small room where Magical Girl guards would use as a hangout. Seeing the rushing Snow White, they knew that something was wrong. Of the 10 Magical Girls inside, five of them stood up as Snow White continued. She kicked the door open to the Device chamber.

Inside, there were Magical Girls working. An expression of surprise was directed towards the ones entering. Snow White stopped running. She headed to a PC, pushing off a black-haired Hime Cut Magical Girl out of her way. Despite a Magical Girl shouting and rolling towards her, Snow White held her weapon, and deflected an attack from her high ground.

"The enemy's here! Attack!"

Other than Snow White, the other Magical Girls had earplugs on, but her expression was enough to convey it. Snow White retreated, rays and iron balls, black cannonballs all fired at once, breaking the floor. From inside the floor, there was a fully black Magical Girl, and where she was, a black cannonball directly hit the Black Magical Girl, blowing her away with an explosion, as she bounced off a wall and fell down to the floor, convulsing as she collapsed.

Snow White took a deep breath. If she didn't hear anymore voices from under the ground, she'd pull out. She didn't hear anything anymore. It's over now.

The ruins were shaped out of a variety of sharp rock formations. A Magical Girl with the ability to "*Enter into any gap*" managed to sneak in, but Snow was able to take her down before she could do any damage.

The Magical Girls began pulling away the Black Magical Girl, and Snow White looked around. Inside the dust, she saw scared Magical Girls, pale blue on her faces. "Don't worry, keep working," instructed Snow White. She spoke to one of the Magical Girls, a Black Nurse Magical Girl.

"Shadow Gale. What's the progress?"

"Um... What was that just now..."

"There was an enemy here. It seems she was a Magical Girl that could pass through the gaps between the stones. She's gone now, so how's progress?"

"Um, it's good. Going well. We're not really stalled or anything."

If that's the case, then she didn't have to use the contract just yet. So long as Puk Puck wouldn't be removed. Sometimes, Snow White had to take things into her own judgement. It was a heavy responsibility, but it was worthwhile. Since she felt like she was working for Puk Puck's sake, she felt motivated and filled with courage.

"Then, please continue. Like I said earlier, there's no need to stop working."

Snow White was thinking. They've already thrown the prisoner away. However, they still need to have countermeasures for Magical Skills that can make someone disappear, dissipate into the wind, or instant teleportation.

Snow White turned towards the Magical Girls in the station.

"Currently, the enemy has broken through the entrance. I need you all to intercept the enemies headed this way. We'll remain here. If I can hear

the voices of their heart, even if they're invisible, they can't hide from me."

Since Puk Puck had told these Magical Girls to "*Follow Snow's every orders properly* , " even the senior Magical Girls will listen to Snow White's new orders.

The Magical Girls in the station swapped with Catherine, Brenda, and Snow White, running towards the front lines.

Snow White placed her hands inside her bag, and took out the Magical Girls stored in there. In cases like this, having the Jack, Queen, and King of Spades be befriended by Puk Puck will be useful to her.

☆ Pfle

10 Magical Girls were running behind her, and if she looked back, she could see they were strong fighters. Some of those people were people that Pfle even knew. Some of those people were people that Pfle wanted to hire. And the others too, from their running speed, were a little different from Magical Girls who only did a little fighting. However, Pfle's personally selected mercenary Magical Girls were no ordinary Magical Girls, either. They clashed directly in front of her.

Swords and canes clashed together. Sparks were flying. A large sickle was swung, ripping any object it touched. Magical Girls jumped out, there was a raid on the passageways. A Magical Girl stepped on a small hole, and was sucked into it, another Magical Girl wrote something with a pen in the passageway, and the personifications of those words flew towards her enemies. Purple gas was emitted, a Magical Girl enfolded by it broke her knees. The other Magical Girls spread out to avoid the gas, and at that moment, a path opened itself, Deluge and Dark Cutie attached themselves to the right and left of Pfle's wheelchair, with Pfle charging ahead at full power.

The enemies were slashing, kicking, and shooting rays against the wheelchair trying to push through them. The mercenaries took out shields, made mirrors, and used their bodies to protect the wheelchair. Against a Magical Skill that made the floor muddy, trying to sink the

wheelchair, Deluge instantly froze the mud, as Pfle crossed over the frozen mud, she accelerated across a curved space towards a safety zone. Deluge unleashed Demon Wings from the shadows, guarding their backs from jagged rays being shot behind them. A few of the Demon Wings that were shot by the rays jumped up and shrank. She ordered the Demon Wings to stop any pursuit, and the wheelchair passed the safety zone.

As she drifted sharply across the floor, she saw 6 Magical Girls waiting just ahead. They didn't seem to be as strong as the previous one, whose numbers were larger than these ones. The light bullets shot by the enemy were intercepted by Deluge's ice shards, Dark Cutie braided her left and right hands together.

Hounds made of shadow began to creep within the hallways. Dark Cutie's Magical Skill, due to it being shadows, couldn't be three-dimensional, so they couldn't just move where they pleased. However, in the Ruins, where the floors, walls, and ceilings were connected, they had more freedom of movement than they ever did in the city. They chipped off the walls, the floor pieces flew, and the ceiling began to break. To the villain, Dark Cutie, she had no thoughts about "Keeping the Ruins in one piece".

They also attacked the Magical Girls too, ripping their skin, blood flying, meat being torn, they lost their will to fight, they retreated further back across the passageways, trying to get out of the range of the shadows. From there, Deluge shot ice shards towards them, as a shield of fire blocked the shards, an enemy Magical Skill.

The ice shards evaporated in a flash of steam, the ice shards that came after that were also stopped by the shield of fire. In total, 10 ice shards were evaporated, the passageways was hot and humid like a sauna. Everything was covered in white smoke, and they couldn't see anything more than 30 centimeters away.

A light shone. A light coming from Pfle's wheelchair. Illuminated from behind. A huge shadow was casted on the water vapors. Dark Cutie's Magical Skill, normally, she was restricted to a surface, and couldn't

extend her reach. However, she could make it bigger by casting a shadow on the fog, not to mention, now, it was able to *stand up*. A huge sword penetrated the shield of fire, and before they could evacuate, the Magical Girls were lashed with a huge thorned whip.

Yet the Magical Girls didn't run away. They raised their weapons and shields, and those that didn't have any raised their arms, they inspired themselves with a rallying cry, they tried to attack Dark Cutie's crazed whip, but Deluge already froze the floors of the passageways, causing them to slip and fall. There, the whip struck, and when the screaming and shouting stopped, finally, the fog was removed, and in the aftermath, there were many Magical Girls miserably sprawled on the floor.

Deluge suddenly narrowed her eyes, Pfle knew that, while she said she wouldn't feel stressed, she was slowly getting stressed out. She knew it, however what's important now was not a way to alleviate Deluge's stress. She can do that by herself later. Somewhere far away, in a place Pfle wouldn't know about.

Metals clanging, screaming, bellowing, there were a variety of hustle and bustles of these kinds. They've arrived, rocket parts being purged and flying away, progressing further while reducing their allies. Other than their speed, in a way, everything was being overlooked, even if she made any mistakes, she wouldn't say anything. However, what they need now is speed. If Puk Puck were to return to the Ruins, she would shift the balance of power. Even if the Osk Faction reaches the Device before Pfle, Shadow Gale is still in danger. She had to give everything she had, Pfle had to reach the Device before anyone else.

However, she still had the enemies in her mind, if she tried to progress quickly, she'll also be damaged just as fast. The mercenaries and the Shufflins were doing all they can, She didn't know how far they've reached. Because their starting movements were good, they lost minimum forces to the enemy. However, from now on, it'll only increase. The Ace of Spades may be strong, but if she was hit, then she won't be okay. Not to mention that they had to fight while averting their eyes from these monitors, while the other side are freely able to fight.

There were no traps or gimmicks so far. Instead of a trap, there was a stuffed bear placed down, and some lace curtains that were pulled up. The sweet fragrance of flowers, probably perfume. This seems like a trap. Her allies passed through, and they felt that if Puk Puck were to pass through here, there'd be no rooms for any traps to be placed.

With confidence, the three moved ahead. Thanks to these passageways, the 3 Magical Girls were able to proceed side by side, neither objects nor Puck Faction Magical Girls got in their ways. Pfle lead the way, destroying any monitors with her Death Ray. Deluge and Dark Cutie followed. Both the sounds of the wheelchair and their footsteps echoed across the hallways. Sometimes, the passages would part. Pfle tried to remember what Hammer said about the overall map of the ruins in her head, and tried to pick the shortest route possible.

The passageways continued, and continued, and continued.

The walls were made of rocks. Even the floors and the ceilings, and there were unfamiliar symbols and patterns that were drawn everywhere, emitting white light, perhaps using some kind of magical energy.

Furthermore, as if outsiders placed it, there were large monitors placed in equal intervals, they lit up the hallways like street lamps lighting the streets. The more they went forward, the more monitors they found. The Wheelchair's Death Ray got to work.

Because she kept shooting her lasers, her speed fell down. Using Deluge's ice spear, she destroyed the nearby speakers.

"Deluge. You need to conserve your energy, leave this to me. If you think you can just take your medicine later, you're making a big mistake."

Deluge's eyes visibly became cranky, she frowned and looked back at Pfle. But of course that's what she'll do, her expression told everything.

They turned right at the crossroads, turned left at the T-Junction, and went straight ahead, coming across some Puck Faction Magical Girls. They dug some trenches and went inside, erecting barriers of junk before that. Multiple automatic rifles had their muzzles aimed this way. Pfle moved with a speed that allowed Dark Cutie's hands to be seen from

many angles. She bore down the ground with a shadow drill, hollowing it in an instant. While using a rock as a shield, Deluge, Dark Cutie, and Pfle, who was grabbed by the collar, and her wheelchair, all jumped down the hole. Immediately afterwards, bullets from the rifles were being fired, barely grazing over Pfle's head. They scraped a stone, causing pieces to fall into the hole.

From here, the wheelchair's Death Ray and Deluge's ice shards shot outwards, and the other side was spraying bullets from their rifles. During the shootout, Dark Cutie bent her fingers as if they had no joints, bending her wrists, her elbows, and combined them. She made a shadow tiger. The tiger crawled on the floor. Bounding through the bullets and shards. It faded into the barricades. Behind the barricade, they could hear screaming from the trenches, and the shooting stopped, the barricade was crushed from the inside. Deluge, Dark Cutie, and Pfle jumped out of the trenches, running back out again.

Beyond the trenches, the 3 Magical Girls proceeded further, trying to turn right at the crossroads, Pfle looked back. Deluge and Dark Cutie were already prepared. From behind the passageways, they heard ecstatic footsteps, and a white figure emerged.

Dark Cutie sent out a shadowy fox, but the girl avoided it. She stabbed it with a weapon that looked like a Naginata. Dark Cutie slashed with a shadow sword, but Snow White kicked across the wall and avoided it, at the same time deflecting Deluge's ice shards. Snow White continued walking, and someone with black armor and a sword and black armor with a cannon appeared. Blade Brenda and Cannon Catherine came as backups.

They met at a disadvantageous place, or rather, because it was disadvantageous for her enemies, that's when she decided to strike, it seems. Pfle activated her wheelchair's autopilot, and rushed towards the Magical Girl Hunter, Snow White.

The 8 Card Soldiers that escorted them into the ruins was a good thing. Uluru insisted on going ahead while Mana followed behind, so she ran, and she kept running, but the Medicine's effects were getting weaker, so Uluru, who kept running without any regards, eventually started getting further away. Since the Card Soldiers were running with Uluru, they wouldn't care about Mana at all.

If she stopped here, Uluru would leave her behind. Mana pulled out her Magical Phone, and threw it forward, hitting Uluru in the back of her head.

Uluru stopped running and turned around. Mana could tell Uluru was angry even without seeing her face.

“What’s the big idea!?”

“You’re running too fast! My medicine’s wearing off”

“Are you *stupid*!? We’re in a rush here!”

“Who are you calling *stupid*? You guys are Magical Girls!”

“Fine, we’ll slow down, now *hurry up* !”

“Before that, I need to ask you a question”

“What? Spit it out!”

“Are you sure we’re going the right way? I thought the Device would be in a different place”

She picked up the Magical Phone she threw earlier, and inside of it she looked at the map of the Ruins. She remembered that they went right on the first 3-way fork, then left on the next crossroads. And at that time, they’d be going the opposite direction from the Device.

“You guys are hopeless”

“Whaddya mean *hopeless* ?”

“I don’t fucking *mean* anything! The Device is in a completely different place. I know we came here to stop the ritual, but what’re we supposed to do if we went to a place and there’s no Device at all?”

“That’s okay”

“What do you *mean*, ‘that’s okay’?”

“That’s okay means that’s okay. See, cause there’s a Magical Girl who controls luck, her name’s Premium Sachiko, and I’m her older sister. There’s also another one, who can tell what’s inside of anything, even if it’s fully closed, her name’s Sorami Nakano, and I’m *also* her older sister. So, there’s no way the road we’re taking is wrong. I can naturally understand the labyrinth.”

It doesn’t seem like Uluru’s words were delusional, that they were just an attempt to convince her that she could lead them to the Device. Mana silently watched Uluru’s notes.

As an active Investigator, she remembered how she always watched the back of Hana Gekokujo, and told her father, “I’m gonna be a cool investigator just like Hana!” Although this wasn’t a good case for sentiments, she couldn’t find it in herself to stop Uluru.

“Plus, look around you!”

Mana looked around her. There were monitors and speakers placed everywhere. They were decorated with origami figures. Mana looked at the video playing, and immediately panicked.

“Nothing changed. What’s going on?”

“Don’t you think that’s strange? If it’s in an unrelated place, then they don’t have to put any monitors or speakers, right? If they didn’t want us coming here, would they put any here?”

“Are they fake?”

“That’s meaningless. Because the Osk Faction guards this place, the enemy knows we have a map, but what’s the point of putting fakes in an unrelated area?”

Every once in a while, Mana would think hard by putting her hand on her chin. Uluru also gave Mana her notes.

“No time to think! C’mon, let’s hurry!”

Uluru hesitantly picked up Mana. She didn't listen to any of Mana's protests, and just started running again. The Card soldiers followed behind, soon arriving at what seems to be a small room. There were some equipment arranged side by side, a table trimmed in the center, the three Magical Girls sitting around the table arose quickly.

And they were quickly suppressed. Although they were superior in number, the 3 Magical Girls were weak. They probably weren't even combatants.

"These girls, they're the ones that are good at handling machines."

"Good at handling machines? Then, why aren't they being used to handle the Device?"

"You'll a lot more than just being good at machines to handle the Device, speaking of which... this room"

"What happened to this room?"

"Maybe this room is where the sound and images come from."

Mana looked around again. It's not that Mages are never good at machines, it's just that Mana's specialty is medicine. She wasn't too detailed on machines. She couldn't understand what machines do just by looking at them.

"You still don't get it?"

"Uluru, I don't get it"

"Man, you're hopeless"

"You're not *helping* ."

"Oh, right. Someone in the Cards can handle it, right? Well, listen to me, then"

Uluru clapped her hands, she started talking to the Card soldiers. The Diamond suited trumps steadily advanced.

The battle at the plaza was converging. The Shufflin IIs fighting within have mostly turned to the enemy's side, those who didn't were probably killed, and Pfe's mercenaries, and probably 10% of the Shufflins managed to enter the Ruins. They were headed towards a cruel fate.

Among the Magical Girls in the Plaza, someone that seemed to be a leader shouted out orders to her group. "Intruders have broken in! We're going to eliminate them!" she said without any panic.

How was she supposed to escape from here afterwards? Even now, this was getting difficult. In addition to being difficult, it'll only be in vain. What'll happen if she escapes?

She had no choice but to disrupt Puk Puck's Ritual before Puk Puck catches up with her. Hammer slowly opened her eyes, as she was filled halfway with despair, she looked at her Magical Phone. "Lady Puck is continuing to make a fuss, Pon," were the characters being displayed, until it changed to "What should we do, Pon?"

Hammer raised her eyebrow.

"What do you mean 'what should we do, Pon'?"

In order to not be noticed, Hammer whispered to the Magical Phone.

The newly displayed characters were, "I heard Uluru's voice from the speakers, Pon. She ordered all Magical Girls under Puk Puck to immediately leave the Ruins, Pon. What should we do, Pon?"

That's when Hammer noticed it. The singing voice coming out from the speaker suddenly turned into a mumbling voice, like someone muttering. Because it was a pretty choppy sound, she noticed it late. She was muttering, probably touching the mic, her communication skills clearly not that good. The sound quality was very bad.

Before Hammer could hear her words clearly, she closed her ears.

Now isn't the time to think about what will happen next. For now, Fal had been deceived. Meaning, Uluru was telling a lie. How did she get control of the speaker system? It doesn't matter now. Now, she had to focus on the problem in front of her. Uluru did say some lies, but

unfortunately, most of the enemies were wearing earplugs so they couldn't listen to her, so her lies were useless. Even though the Shufflin II that have been befriended were all trying to escape the Ruins, that had no meaning now.

Hammer turned on her communication device. The Magical Girls in the plaza now, most of them were Osk Faction Magical Girls in battle, all of the Shufflin II were brought here, Mana, Pfle and her subordinates, and hopefully, Lethe, should all be gathered inside these Ruins, she set the frequency for all of the people she's met face to face, putting the communication device close to the speaker. If everyone heard Uluru's lies, then they could evacuate everyone from the Puck Faction.

She couldn't be noticed, just a little more, a little more, she got closer, and just a little more, and then, a voice called out.

"Whatcha doing?"

It was unbearable, it was sweet, it was a beautiful voice. Before she even thought of who it was, her body moved. Hammer was frustrated by the feeling that her heart had been corroded. She had the thought of wanting to stay in this feeling forever. But if she gave in here, then everything she's done will be meaningless.

Hammer tried to fly away, but just before her feet left the ground, she felt a terrible impact from behind her, knocking her down to the ground. When she fell down to the ground, she tilted her head and looked at her back, and saw a spear stabbed into her. It was the kind of spear the Spade Shufflins used. She also saw the legs of someone approaching. They were lovely legs, they had feet that Hammer wanted to kiss. Hammer used all of her remaining strength to turn her head around, placing her face close to her microphone.

"Lethe has been defeated, the Puck Faction has suppressed the Plaza in front of the Entrance"

She coughed blood on her microphone. The spear on her back was being shoved in, breaking her ribs, she felt it shaking as it settled deep

inside her guts, piercing her internal organs. Hammer coughed out blood once again, but didn't let go of her microphone.

"Puk Puck... has gone into the Ruins"

She was kicked away, and her Magical Phone tumbled away. Hammer saw the world spinning, until she stopped. She was looking at the blue sky. Hammer coughed up blood, it flowed from her mouth to her ears. She fiddled with her mic settings, not letting anyone hear her voice. Her consciousness was fading, it felt like she was going crazy with the pain, and everything started to turn black.

The Magical Girls in the Plaza were cheering. While Puk Puck's call was spreading, Hammer slightly loosened the lips that had blood dripping from them, and smiled. If Puk Puck thought she's already won, she's made a big mistake. While thinking of those words, Hammer closed her eyes.

☆ Princess Deluge

The White Magical Girl lightly avoided Pfle's charge, and as they passed each other, she swung her Naginata at her. Neither Deluge's ice shards nor Dark Cutie's shadows made it in time. Like a breeze, Pfle's left hand struck the weapon. She didn't just block it, but she shifted the focus of the slash, avoiding any fatal injuries. However, her left hand was cut, torn around her wrist, but while Pfle screamed only once, she continued to rush her wheelchair. She must have anticipated swinging her hands when she launched her wheelchair. Even though Snow White can read a person's heart, there's a limit to her reaction time.

Snow White tried to pursue Pfle, but Deluge stepped in between them. Snow White's weapon collided with Deluge's trident, and Snow White retreated her body. Then, Cannon Catherine aimed the barrel of her cannon, just before she shot, Snow White cried out,

"Don't!"

But it was too late. Dark Cutie's rope shadow was slithering on the floor, following her armor, Catherine didn't notice as it tangled itself around her cannon barrel. Just before she shot, Dark Cutie pulled on her rope, the cannon turned 90 degrees, now firing towards Blade Brenda, who was next to her, and as it exploded, the two black armored girls were blown away by the small explosion. Dark Cutie's rope changed to a snake, slithering over the two fallen armors, tying them up together, the snake then turned into a hard chain, tightening them together.

Inside the white smoke, Snow White inserted her left hand into her bag on her waist, while holding her Naginata with her right hand, pointing it at Deluge. Their distance was about 10 meters. Even for Dark Cutie and Deluge, this isn't exactly a *separated* distance, they were already very close.

Dark Cutie muttered.

"They're coming. I'll hold them off. Is that okay?"

"Shouldn't this be a 2-man job?"

"Unfortunately, that's not possible now."

Dark Cutie flipped, avoiding a spear being thrusted from behind. Followed by another, and another one again. Spade Shufflins have shown up. Their numbers were Jack, Queen, and King. They had no light in their eyes. They had abandoned the Osk Faction, and now fight for Puk Puck's sake. Deluge stood halfway, whispering towards Dark Cutie.

"I thought you wanted to fight Snow White"

"Snow White isn't the hero anymore"

Deluge didn't know what to say.

"You realize that if I fight her... I might kill Snow White"

"It doesn't matter"

"You're fine with it?"

"You're the hero now"

Deluge didn't answer. She grabbed her medicine, and consumed it.

"Luxury Mode, On!"

Deluge sprang towards Snow White, swinging her trident twice, then three times.

At the same time, Dark Cutie shot her shadow arrows with shadow bows, changing the arrow to a lasso entwining the rocks, avoiding the spears by pulling herself forward and rolling away. A Shufflin thrusted her spear, Dark Cutie rose up quickly and launched a high kick, but one of them blocked it with their spear, yet she couldn't stop her momentum, causing two Shufflins to crash to a wall, making a cracked pattern appear on the wall.

Dark Cutie bent her right hand in a complex position, trying to make another shadow form. She ran away from the Shufflin who tried to stab her, running backwards, the three Shufflins held their spears and followed her.

Deluge didn't follow them, instead, she stopped and faced Snow White.

Dark Cutie and Deluge had only just met a while ago. Unlike the Pure Elements, they hadn't had practice simulations against each other repeatedly. Even if she did try to help, they'd both have to improvise. Snow White and the Shufflins probably had about the same amount of time as they did since their first meeting. But Snow White didn't just read her enemies, but also her allies as well. Even without consulting, she could easily partner up with a Magical Girl she just met.

So Deluge should split them up here.

Before Deluge even attacked Snow White, Snow White had already prepared with a backstep. Deluge's mind was being read. Even so, even if Deluge's mind was being read, that won't be a problem.

Deluge abandoned her hesitations, but she couldn't seem to do it. She was still hesitating. When she relied on Blue Bell's... Lapis Lazuline's candies, she never seemed to hesitate at all. No matter how sad or angry she got, as long as she held her weapon, it was okay. No matter how

painful, no matter how bitter, if she had a weapon, there may be some salvation for her.

Now, she couldn't just blindly think about nothing as she wielded her weapons. She was thinking about the enemy before her. She thought about the people in hand. She wondered why she was doing this, and she wondered if there was another way, that was all she thought about. Even if she was being manipulated by someone, wasn't this okay? She was able to think for herself, decide for herself, even though she suffers every time she couldn't do it, she didn't know what to do now that she could. She didn't know what the correct answer was.

Her head was spinning, she couldn't think straight, she didn't know where she was supposed to go. She didn't know. She didn't know anything.

Before her was Snow White. She was a powerful Magical Girl, known as the Magical Girl Hunter. She was looking at Deluge, her blade pointed at her. She was lost like Deluge, but she wasn't worried about anything. That's why Princess Inferno asked her. Hunt down the evil Magical Girls.

Deluge bit her lip.

Snow White made a promise to Inferno, but now Snow White was on the evil Magical Girls' side. Regardless of Deluge's troubles, which, she didn't want to admit. Inferno came to her mind. She was always bright, always pulling around everyone and running with them. She was always cheerful, never showing any weakness, smiling even until her death. Now, she knew that she was strong. It wasn't honorable to want to show strength. Deluge always thought "*I didn't want to show anyone who was left my weaknesses*".

Inferno was killed. Tempest too, Quake too, everyone was killed. Prism Cherry was weaker than anyone else, but she came back to help everyone, despite fighting powerful Magical Girl opponents, she didn't withdraw not one step, and she was killed. There was no reason for the Pure Elements to all be killed. They got involved with a Land of Magic

conflict, and that's not a good reason. If that's the reason, then Deluge was fine if the Land of Magic was gone.

Deluge shouted out. She swung down her trident, ice arrows shooting from the front, all of them avoided by Snow White. Deluge's mind was being read... That's why, she grabbed her medicine, swallowing all of it.

"Luxury Mode, Burst!"

Flames were burning from her back and spreading throughout her whole body. What was she thinking? Her mind's capacity for thinking weakened, conversely, her body just wanted to move. She wanted to move as well.

Deluge knows Snow White's weakness. When she was fighting the Ace of Spades, she couldn't keep up with the Ace's physical abilities, even if she read her mind, she couldn't avoid her attacks. With *Luxury Mode Burst*, Deluge's movements were comparable to the Ace of Spades. Snow White won't be able to keep up, as Deluge carefully thrusted one by one, she desperately avoided using her weapon.

That wasn't her only weakness. Deluge knew that Snow White struggled against Dark Cutie. Snow White wasn't effective at defending against automatic things that had nothing to read. Naturally, if something didn't have a mind, she couldn't read it. So Deluge swiveled ice shards around herself. Even if she read Deluge's mind, these ice shards would automatically orbit her without her command. This will make it harder for Snow White to fight.

Deluge thrusted, Snow White dodged. Snow White wasn't trying to match weapons with her, instead bending her body, jumping up from the floor, jumping off from the walls. Deluge froze the floor where she predicted Snow White would land, but Snow White ricocheted off another wall, kicking it to launch herself to Deluge, intending to slice her, Deluge stepped backwards to avoid it, and putting strength in both of her legs, she jumped forward.

By using Luxury Mode Burst, Deluge was able to strengthen her entire physical power, launching three consecutive strikes. Snow White could

only defend. She avoided the first blow, parried the second one, and blocked the third one with her weapon, losing her balance as she tried to backstep. Since Deluge still had her weapon, she didn't back down. Deluge waited until her trident made contact with Snow White's weapon. Then, she lowered the temperature of her trident's tip. The blades freezing the weapon. Supported by Deluge's arm strength, Deluge will stand her ground.

Deluge held the handle of her trident, pulling it back at full power. Snow White retreated by herself. She tried to take out her fire extinguisher from her bag, but Deluge predicted that. As Snow White blinked, Deluge closed the distance between them, and kicked the fire extinguisher away. There was a high-pitched sound as the fire extinguisher rolled across the ground. Deluge increased the temperature of her blades, Deluge swung her trident, throwing away Snow White's weapon. Another high-pitched sound, it was rolling the other direction from the fire extinguisher.

Snow White was trying to pull something from inside of her bag. However, whatever Snow White would pull out, Deluge could move faster.

Deluge didn't want to fight Snow White. But she shouldn't think about those kinds of things now.

Princess Deluge thought of the Pure Elements. If she thought about them, then the impossible can become possible. She felt like she could do anything. If she thought about how there was no reasons for their deaths, there was nothing Deluge couldn't do. Just as Dark Cutie said, Deluge was the hero now.

Princess Deluge raised her trident, at the same time, Snow White took out something from her bag. While Deluge was trying to thrust forward with her spear, she stopped for just a moment. What Snow White was holding was a familiar blade. During the simulation fights, or in fights with Disruptors, it was Inferno's Crescent Blade.

But still, Deluge moved. The trident that she swung down sliced the shoulder of Snow White, who twisted her body to avoid it, ripping her

skin. However, Snow White's Crescent Blade managed to deeply pierce Deluge's flank. Deluge staggered, trying to stand by focusing on her feet. As Snow White also stood up, she swung her Crescent blade, and Deluge's chest was slashed.

The pain was burning and hot. Deluge dropped her trident, her right hand reaching up for the sky. As she lost her balance, she fell down, and she was slashed again, this time her back was torn. She fell, and tried to support herself on the floor with her hands, she touched liquid... it was her own blood. Her visibility drained, it was getting darker. She vaguely saw Blue Bell Candy in her vision. She wished she could choose the last thing she saw, and as she smiled bitterly, Deluge's consciousness faded and remained in the darkness.

Chapter 10: All for You

☆ Pfle

Contact with Cockle from the Device Chamber was lost. She had thought, using her Magical Skill of being able to enter any gap, that she'd head straight for the Device, but it looks like she's been caught along the way. One of Pfle's winning paths ceased to exist.

Hammer's announcement wasn't good. Lethe had been defeated by Puk Puck, that meant another winning path ceased to exist. To top it off, Puk Puck was returning to the ruins, meaning she had no more time left, there was no one who could match Puk Puck now.

Deluge and Dark Cutie as well, if she thought about their opponents, struggling against them would be inevitable. It's better to throw away any delusions of hope that they'll come to rush and save her. The only choice Pfle had is to pray for their safety. For Fal's sake, she also had to pray for Snow White's safety.

...Well, now she just has to adapt.

Pfle slowly placed her hands to the doorway of the Break Room, and slowly pushed it open.

☆ Yoshioka

On the rocky outcropping that stood out, she found one that looked like a slope, and made full use of her hands and legs to climb towards the top. From her rucksack, she took out her binoculars and crawled prone on the ground, overlooking the circular Plaza.

In the wide open plaza, the Magical Girls have begun to clean up. Was it Puk Puck's tribute to the First Mage, her mentor, that she respected? Or did she just not want anything contaminating the Ruins? Even within the Shufflin II, the Spades that were in charge of combat all turned to Puk Puck, there was no one left here. Only a few remained at the Plaza. The

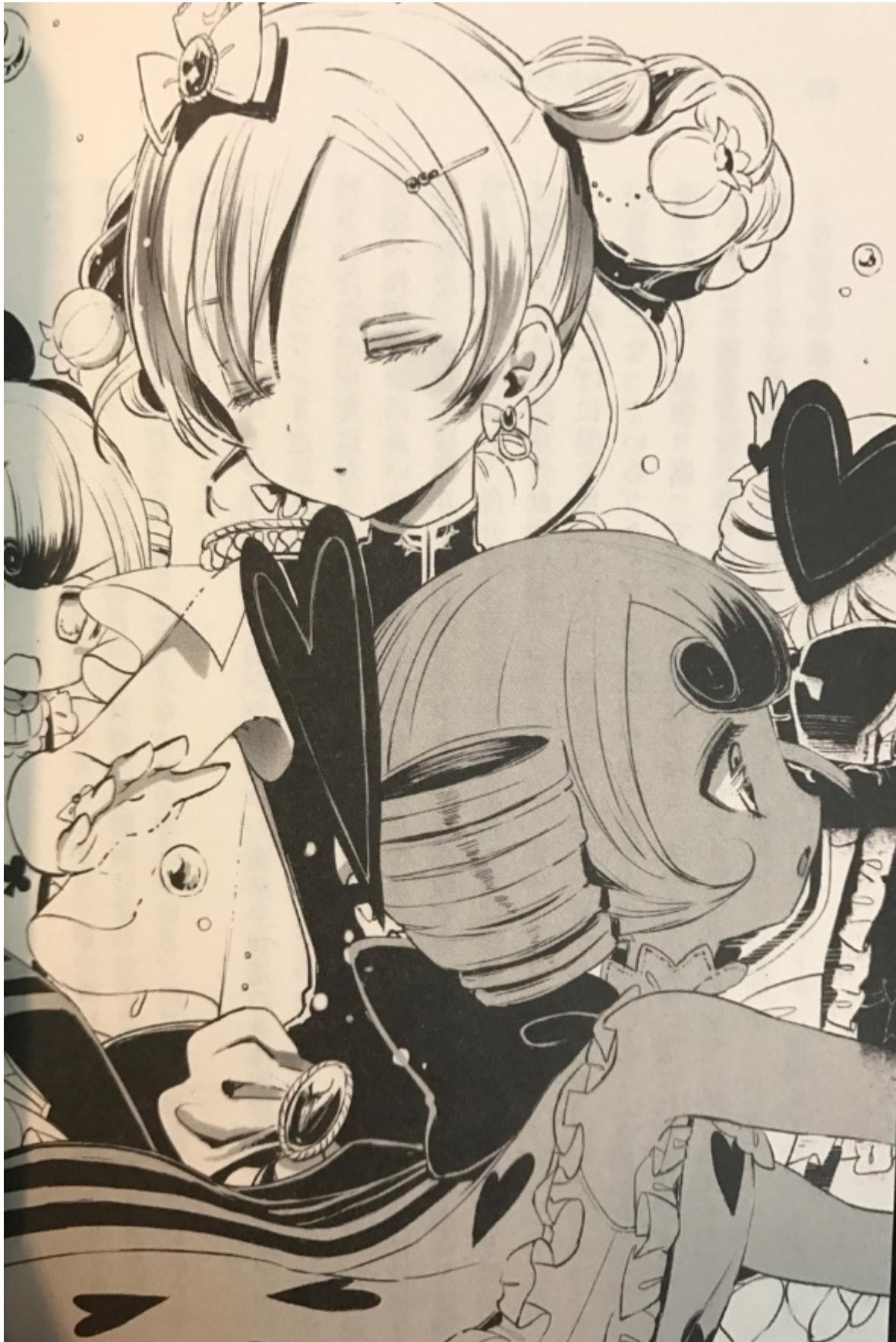
Diamonds, Clubs, Hearts, and Puck's other subordinates, most of them were just cleaning up.

The only people left here should be pained, broken, and sad. They all had the common desire of wanting to serve by Puk Puck's side, some of them got their wish, some of them didn't. However, they couldn't convince her that they could just go to the Ruins because they're good at fighting. Because Puk Puck herself already had invincible strength. She decided her companions based on loyalty rather than fighting ability. Being unable to be present during an important moment such as the activation of the Device. Such emptiness, such sadness. Surely they must've felt that. Even from a third party's point of view, she could see their dissatisfaction.

Everyone was picking up garbage, they were cleaning up the unmoving bodies of the other Magical Girls. These girls had harder feelings of indignation than Shufflin II. Rather than original subordinate Magical Girls who have served Puk Puck for a longer time, the only ones that followed her back earlier were the Shufflin II, despite having robbed the Spades Shufflin IIs job. They expressed their anger at Shufflin II openly, kicking them for any mistakes they made, they themselves weren't working, instead staring adoringly at the monitors that displayed Puk Puck's figure.

Yoshioka stroked her hair sadly. Puk Puck should've loved everyone equally, and everyone should've loved everyone else equally... Yet within Puk Puck's subordinates, disparity was born instead. Magical Girls that they had caught earlier, Magical Girls who didn't work because they're too proud, Magical Girls that were chosen honorably. Even if they've accumulated dissatisfaction, they would never disagree with a direct order from Puk Puck, for now, they just endured the labor of trash pickup. Actually, this is a great miniature view of modern society.

Yoshioka heard a crumbling sound, she looked towards the source, one monitor had collapsed. A Magical Girl in blue clothing raised her right leg, standing next to the fallen monitor with only her left leg. The remaining Magical Girls saw her, the blue Magical Girl didn't mind their gazes, she moved on behind the next monitor, and kicked it down as well.



Angry voices were shouted. The Clubs Shufflins raised their maces, Diamond Shufflins had tasers and glue guns, Yoshioka kept her chest up high and watched over the situation.

“It’s an Osk Faction collaborator!”

One of the Magical Girls pointed her finger and shouted out. The Hearts Shufflin began to jump in, and the Blue Magical Girl nimbly dodged them,

something fell down. A beautiful candy ball was rolling on the ground. The Hearts Shufflin II got up silently, looking around, tilting her neck. It didn't look like she wanted to fight anymore.

"Be careful! She's using some kind of Magical Skill!"

Someone shouted out.

The Shufflin IIs rushed in, the Blue Magical Girl passed through them all. When the Blue Magical Girl touched the bodies of the Shufflin II, as if just grazing over them, each time, a shining candy ball rolled out. When she pulled out the candies, the Shufflin IIs would stop on the spot. They looked around their surroundings with confusion.

One of the Magical Girls jumped and spread out her dragonfly wings, descending down towards ground level and flew at a low attitude. The Shufflin IIs flocked towards their Blue Magical Girl opponent, standing so that they don't let her touch them. The Dragonfly Magical Girl secretly went behind the Blue Magical Girl, and accelerated towards her. She had wanted to tackle the Blue Magical Girl from behind, her arms already in position. The Blue Magical Girl squatted on the spot, avoiding the Dragonfly Magical Girl's tackle.

She didn't even seem to be surprised. She didn't even glance at the Dragonfly Magical Girl, as if she had eyes behind her back, the Blue Magical Girl avoided the attack.

The Dragonfly Magical Girl rose up, looking down at the Ruins from the sky.

It seems that the Magical Girls in the ground are doing their best to repel the Blue Magical, though the Blue Magical Girl barely broke a sweat. A barrage of light spheres aimed from the sides of the Blue Magical Girl, but none of them hit, some threw stones, some threw mud, yet none of them hit. Every time the Blue Magical Girl moved, candy rolled on the ground, increasing the amount of people incapable of battling. The Puck Faction Magical Girls other than the Shufflin II collapsed and couldn't move after being touched.

The Dragonfly Magical Girl was watching down with regret. Yoshioka thought of what she would do if she were in her position. The Blue Magical Girl was clearly a professional combatant. The other Magical Girls couldn't even lift a finger on her. At this rate, it was better for the Dragonfly Magical Girl to report directly to the Ruins.

Apparently, the Dragonfly Magical Girl had reached the same conclusion. She took out her Magical Phone, turning it on to contact somewhere, and when she placed it on her ears, she suddenly dodged away.

It was a stone. The size of an adult's head, thrown directly towards the Dragonfly Magical Girl. The Dragonfly Magical Girl rose up further while avoiding the stone, at the same time talking towards her Magical Phone, reporting the situation below while looking down on the ground, her eyes meeting the Blue Magical Girl's.

Her opponent that was supposed to be on the ground, suddenly, was within reaching distance.

Yoshioka saw everything. The stone that she threw to the Dragonfly Magical Girl wasn't trying to hit her, it was meant as a foothold. The Blue Magical Girl ran up the walls of the Ruins, kicking against it to jump to the air, and kicked against the thrown stone to jump even further. This was an impressive amount of physical ability, even for a Magical Girl.

The Dragonfly Magical Girl tried to escape further into the sky, but she couldn't. The Blue Magical Girl grabbed her ankle, and from there, a piece of candy rolled downwards, breaking the Dragonfly Girl's posture in the sky, causing her to fall down. The Blue Magical Girl held the body of the Dragonfly Magical Girl, falling down with her, kicking a wall just before she landed to kill any shock. She laid the Dragonfly Magical Girl's body on the ground.

While blushing in her cheeks, Yoshioka looked at the Blue Magical Girls' actions. It was spectacular. She's always been troubled due to the lack of stimulations like this ever since she's started serving one of the Three Sages.

☆ Uluru

“Aah! You’re so *slow* ! Hurry it up already!”

“You’re a Magical Girl, you don’t get to say that!”

Surrounded by Shufflin IIs, Uluru was running ahead. Since Mana was so slow, Uluru pulled her hand and dragged her along, but she was still slow. Did Uluru’s actions have any meaning, or was it useless? She couldn’t notice anyone present or absent. Their current location should be just off the center of their target right now, but she didn’t know which direction away from the center. However, she did know that just running would be useless.

Missing walls, broken monitors, smooth floors, and Magical Girls collapsed on the ground everywhere.

The more she ran, the more destruction marks she began to see. Uluru only focused on the hand she was holding, and Mana also grasped her hand tighter. Right now, Uluru simply appreciated the warmth of her hand. Its as if she was saying *Don’t panic* , attempting to support Uluru’s weak heart.

She ran, and ran, for now she just had to run forward, shaking off any troubled thoughts and hesitation.....

“Snow White!”

There she is! Snow White, who she’s been looking over and over for. *We’ll defeat our enemies together* , that’s the promise that she was holding onto. Snow White was standing alone in a wide open space.

Snow White raised her weapon. Even just raising it up, she looked tired, she was breathing heavily, her knees were shaking. Her white costume was stained red with blood. Some of that blood might even be her own.

The girl on Snow White’s feet was surely her fallen enemy. A light blue Magical Girl with a trident. She was lying down on a blood pool, Uluru didn’t know if she was dead or alive.

Snow White looked at Uluru. Her expression screamed out “*More enemies!*”. Uluru gritted her teeth. Snow White scowled, lowering her weapon, and started to run.

“Snow White! Stop and wait a minute! If you don’t stop, Lady Puck will get angry!”

Snow White could practically counter Uluru’s Magical Skill, or so she said. Back then, at the park, when she heard Uluru’s lie, Snow White was the only one who stood back up and acted normally. However, Uluru also remembered, even then, before Snow White stood up, she *also* lay prone. In response to Uluru’s lie, Snow White acted before her head could think. Meaning that Uluru could still use her lies. If she could make Snow White believe her, even for just a little bit, she could slow down Snow White’s movements.

Uluru’s lies made Snow White stop for just a moment, stopping her feet would be enough for the Ace of Spades to rush towards Snow White. She chased after Snow White, wielding a spear. Snow White blocked it, there was no room for Snow White to get hurt. Two hits, three hits. The other Shufflins joined in as well and started attacking Snow White. Uluru shouted out,

“If you kill Snow White, Lady Puck will hate you!”

Snow White was unable to endure the Card Soldiers attacks, at the same time Mana threw a Magical Rope. Although Snow White avoided it, she couldn’t avoid the Spade’s attacks hitting her body, the other card soldiers also overlapped her, pressing her down to the ground.

While Snow White was breathing heavily, she looked straight at Uluru. Her eyes were filled with the color of hatred, Uluru didn’t want Snow White to look at her that way. Uluru also didn’t want to look away. Uluru looked back at Snow White, she raised her fist, but then she dropped it down again. Uluru realized, there was nothing she could do about Snow White now.

Uluru poked Mana with her elbow.

“Hey, what now?”

“Don’t ‘What now’ me”

Mana ran towards the Magical Girl on the pool of blood, she began to heal her wounds. She seems to still be alive. Uluru finally couldn’t help it. While staring down at Snow White, the Card Soldiers awaited her instructions as they pinned her down.

“Could you hold on just a moment”

Uluru turned around. There was a Blue Magical Girl. She seemed familiar, was she, she could neither agree nor disagree. Uluru held up her rifle, she wanted to open her mouth to tell her a lie, the blue Magical Girl shook her head in a panic.

“I’m not your enemy. Sorry if I surprised you, I guess that’s just my kind of Magical Skill. Ah, wait, no, that’s not my Magical Skill.”

“Who are you? Whaddya want!?”

“My, my”

The Blue Magical Girl approached Snow White, she stroked her cheeks. From her stroke, something rolled down. Beautiful candy shining in seven colors. Snow White looked surprised, a groaning voice leaked out from behind her throat. Was she trying to say something? Her eyelids dropped down, her hands drooped without force, and Snow White fell down.

“You killed her!?”

“Nothing like that. She just fainted.”

She detransformed. She didn’t see Snow White, she saw a girl wearing a student’s uniform. In a panic, Uluru began to order the Card Soldiers.

“Wait! She’s not a Magical Girl anymore, don’t pin her down! You’ll crush her! If you do that, Lady Puck will hate you!”

“Yep, that’s right. Tut, tut, hurry on, now”

The Blue Magical Girl said so with a light tone, silently approaching the Card Soldiers pinning down Snow White, she stretched out her fingers and stroked each one of them. After a while, there she stopped. There

were candies as many as the Card soldiers that rolled on the ground, and they looked towards each other.

“I’m afraid this is the extent of what I can do. Any questions?”

“Like I said, whaddya want!?”

“I’m a friend, I’m a *friend* . Don’t worry.”

The Blue Magical Girl rapidly produced candy between her fingers. Or maybe she didn’t produce it, she probably pulled it out like a magic trick and already had them beforehand.

While peeling off the Card Soldiers from Snow White, the rainbow colored candy rolled towards her palm.

“This crystal represents the anger and hatred that someone has before they die. If you use this, I’m sure something interesting will happen... Well then, me and the Card Soldiers would love to stay and chat, but if you two stay here any longer, I reckon it’s going to be quite dangerous. You’re quite injured, so its best to avoid them in the sidelines, don’t you think?”

★ Puk Puck

The Magical Girls gathered along Puk Puck, they proceeded on towards the Device chambers.

The Plaza has already been captured. It should take some time before the enemy’s reinforcements can arrive. She wanted to fully control the Ruins. And for that, she had to return to the Device and strengthen its defenses. On the way, she absorbed every single fighting Magical Girl, and her group grew bigger and bigger. Since the group got too big and it became harder to move, she would ask them to clean up trash in the Ruins.

In the end, she had a group of 10 Magical Girls with her. As she went forward, the battle marks became even more horrible. Plushies were burnt, decorations were burnt, Monitors were on fire. Who would do these

terrible things? Puk Puck endured her sorrow and continued to move forward.

While she proceeded, a group of Card Soldiers came her way, and when she heard their story, she thought that she had to spearhead the group. Puk Puck led them, if she met any other enemies, she can turn them into her friends, and none of them would suffer any injuries. In this way, she can increase her friends. The opponents that they fought a while ago, now swore allegiance to Puk Puck.

As she thought that, she was stopped.

“Wait! Something’s wrong!”

“Really?”

The Card Soldiers she was looking at seemed angry. Puk Puck spread out her hands as if saying *come be my friends*. But they were angry, they were mad. Soon, Puk Puck’s friends intercepted them. A brawl had begun in one of the narrow hallways. Although they had the advantage against the enemy with overwhelmingly large numbers, they couldn’t focus their strength due to the narrowness of the area, as the enemy’s spirits were high, so they couldn’t be suppressed. A black armored Magical Girl came out, being attacked by Card Soldiers.

The enemy Card Soldiers were fighting while eating red candies, and they were repeatedly doing so. She didn’t know what they were doing but she knew the candies were the problem.

“Well, just take all of their candies and it’ll be all good, ‘mkay?’

“There’s not many of them. We’ll suppress them soon enough!”

They *did* have the number advantage, but if they used their Magical Skills, then they’ll immediately experience some friendly fire. Not to mention the enemy’s morale was rising. The Ace of Spades was leading, being attacked by spears and clubs all around her, unable to get her hands in to fight back.

“Right, Puk’s gonna leave right now, ‘mkay?’

“Just a bit more, a bit more!”

“Yeah... nope, not gonna wait, sorry!”

She had to take control and move ahead. She couldn't just do these things leisurely. If she didn't reach the Device, she couldn't fulfill her true purpose. Puk Puck ran. She ignored the voices telling her to stop. She jumped off the walls, using the momentum to jump off the next wall, with her kicks, she zig-zagged across the halls as she broke the walls around her. She flew past the Card Soldiers' heads. She stepped on the Ace of Spades' head, who pushed her spear upwards, jumping from her head between spaces of the other Magical Girls' shoulders, jumping above all of the Card Soldiers.

“See ya all later!”

As she said that, Puk Puck began to run without looking back.

☆ Shadow Gale

The Device was finally nearing completion. Afterwards, all that was left for Shadow Gale to do was to remodel it. How long would it take, Shadow Gale herself didn't know for sure.

She configured it for its rightful owner and user, Puk Puck, its usage was to preserve Magical Girls. The other Magical Girls were happy, hugging each other, crying out loud. Their Great Leader, the best Magical Girl, the manifestation of beauty, their absolute master that they served, Puk Puck. The pleasure they had in serving her. They would cry for her. They imagined what kinds of compliments she would say to them, which only made them more delighted.

But wait, something strange was happening. Just ahead of this room, there were screams and yelling from the Break Room, and she heard some beating and fighting sounds. They became more and more intense. Was the enemy here? The Magical Girls tensed up, they watched the entrance, holding their breath. The entrance door opened slightly, only

one Magical Girl came inside. That Magical Girl closed the door behind her, and she smiled.

“Hm..... is it finished? Or are you still not done?”

In the middle of the dancing dust cloud, there was a distorted shape, advancing gently, was a wheelchair, and a Magical Girl with a bird eyepatch. Shadow Gale knew who this girl was. She should've known who she was, but her head was only filled with Puk Puck's orders for her, so it took a while for her to remember. At that time, the Wheelchair Magical Girl spoke to the Device Repair team while listening to their words one by one, prompting them, striking up conversations, acting very honest.

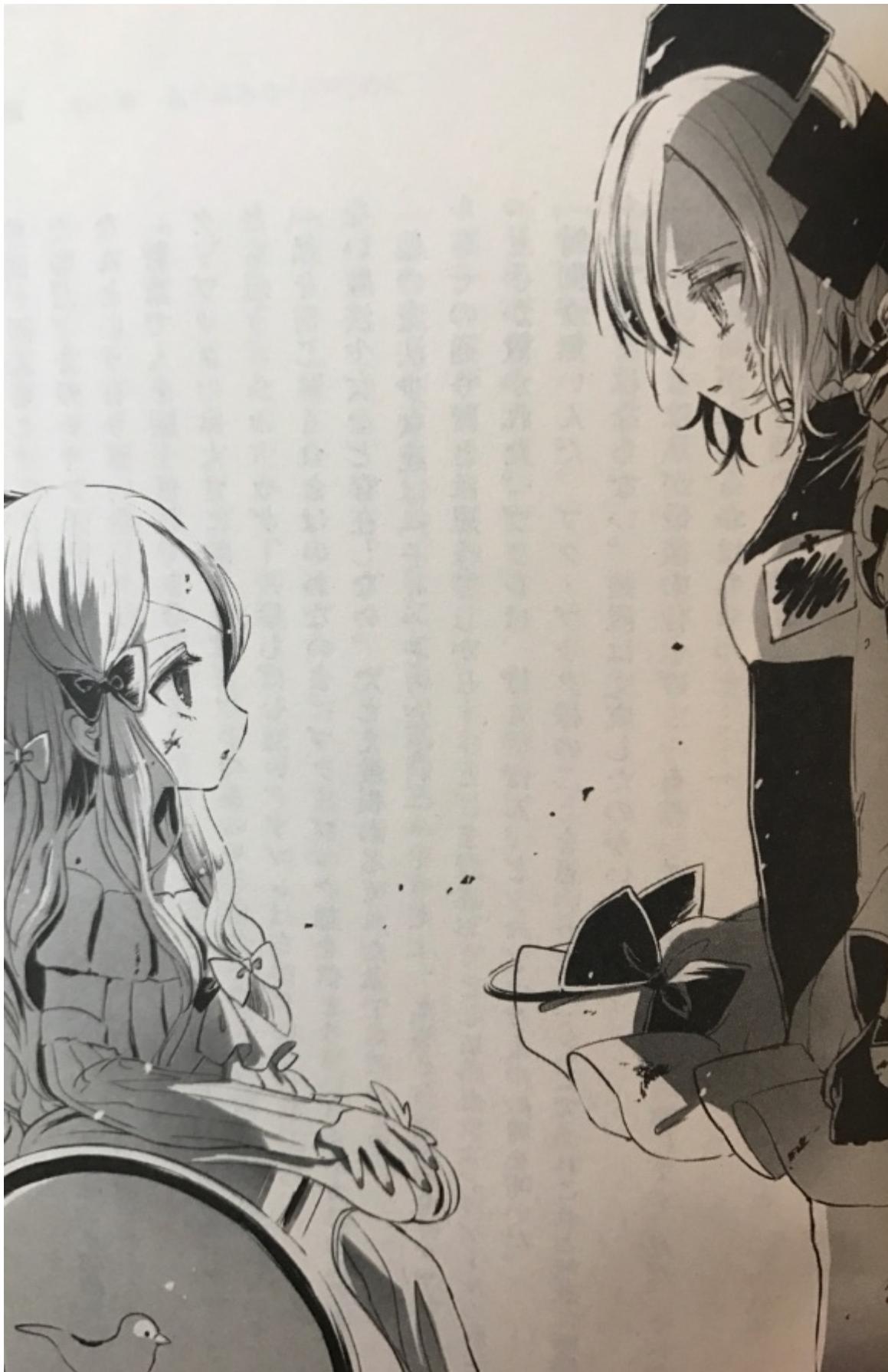
Shadow Gale knew, this girl was far from an honest Magical Girl.

She stepped in front of the other Magical Girls as if to block them, and she glared at the Wheelchair Magical Girl.

“What are you doing here, My Lady? Have you come to take me back?”

Perhaps, if that were the case, she felt like it would be better to hit or kick her. The other Magical Girls also looked like they were resisting, their hands were holding their tools, if she came closer, they'll attack. The Wheelchair Magical Girl... Pfle, slowly looked around her surroundings.

“Why are you all so *hostile*? Come to take you back? That's silly, I'm an ally, I'm your comrade. When I was touched by the Great Magical Girl, Puk Puck, I finally had an opportunity to change. If I let this chance go to waste, then I'll become nothing but a waste, just as you said. Isn't this amazing? Why I can't even see with all these tears coming out.”



She had known that this disgusting Magical Girl was someone whose words couldn't be trusted. However, if she really had been touched by Puk Puck's greatness, then this Pfle shouldn't be the same as before, or so she thought. Shadow Gale felt lost, and Pfle graciously took her right hand.

“I’m not asking you to trust me. I’m asking you to trust Lady Puk Puck. No one could resist changing after being touched by her, not even someone as twisted as me.”

The other Magical Girls whispered words like “Yeah, she’s right” and “Oh, that’s right”. Even Shadow Gale thought that was also true. However... Shadow Gale, who was still lost, had her shoulder grasped by a hand. *Tap, tap*, Pfle placed her hands on Shadow Gale’s shoulders.

“We don’t have much time. Think of Lady Puk Puck. We can’t afford to waste any more time. Is the Device ready?”

“No, I’m last in line... We’ll start after finishing one last step, but, I don’t know how long that’ll take...”

Pfle narrowed her eyes, slightly curling her eyebrows.

“Have you finished setting the Device?”

“Yes. It’s been designed for Lady Puk Puck’s use.”

“I heard that... *Lady Puk Puck* had retrieved Premium Sachiko’s contract, do you know anything about that?”

“I have it. I’ll only use it when it’s time.”

“Could I see it?”

“But...”

“I’m just going to take a look at it. That’s fine, isn’t it? You can keep it.”

Pfle read through the contract filled with fine handwriting, and nodded.

“Hm... We have no choice, we’ve been cornered... Mamori, it’s time to use the contract.”

“What? No, but, I have to wait for Lady Puk Puck’s instructions.”

“There’s only 1 step left, now is the time for you to use it. Lady Puck gave these instructions to me herself, there shouldn’t be any problems, right?”

Pfle turned towards the Magical Girls behind Shadow Gale.

"Ladies! You've done well! Now, let us prepare for Lady Puck's arrival!"

The Magical Girls responded to Pfle's speech, "Yeah!" they shouted out, thrusting up their right arm. Everyone returned to their original work stations, only Shadow Gale was left. Normally, she should've trusted Pfle. It should've been okay, but Shadow Gale just couldn't believe Pfle. Kanoe Hitokouji, Pfle, she's a person who wants others to believe her. Her words seemed reliable, her attitude seemed sincere, her features seemed fragile, to her gentle smile, only a fool would believe her charisma, she deceives, she deprives, she takes away, Shadow Gale has seen many people killed because of her. Shadow Gale looked into Pfle's eyes.

"My Lady, you're not lying to me, are you?"

"Of course not. The enemy is approaching. We have to hurry. This is something that only *you* can do, Mamori. This is not something that I could do. If we don't hurry, everything will be lost."

There was no usual ironic smile. Her expression was serious. Pfle laid her hands on Shadow Gale's hands. Shadow Gale reflexively tried to pull away, Pfle didn't try to grasp her tightly.

"Just this once, you *have* to trust me. If my predictions are true, our enemies will soon arrive, and then, if we don't activate the Device, everything will be over. Everything we've done, everything we'll ever do, all of them will be lost."

Pfle slowly took her hand, Shadow Gale slowly noticed how warm her hands were getting. Pfle looked at Shadow Gale. Shadow Gale closed her eyes, she gritted her teeth and nodded strongly. Up until now, she's always seen Pfle spewing lies. She had been deceived, dragged around, and adding up all that she's done, it'd probably reach a 5-digit figure. But she swore in her heart, "*I'm never getting fooled twice*", yet she was still deceived. It always repeats, and repeats, and repeats... in the end, she didn't know how to stop being deceived.

However, there was one thing, one thing that she'd taken. When Kanoe Hitokouji wasn't lying, she would know. Right now, Pfle was truly afraid,

deep within her heart, she had thought “*The enemy will soon be here*” . If they didn’t hurry, then everything would be over.

Shadow Gale didn’t think she’d believe in Pfle. Shadow Gale decided to believe in her own life of constantly being deceived. Looking back at her old life, she remembered what kind of person as Pfle, and Shadow Gale’s heart felt stunned, she looked at the Monitor where Puk Puck was dancing, reminding her of what she should be doing now. She had to think about what Pfle had said. She had to activate the Device.

Shadow Gale checked off everything in the contract, and finally, she signed her name. Afterwards, she started the Device.

★ Puk Puck

Puk Puck ran earnestly. The sounds she heard were just white noise, the sights she saw were just a blur, she wondered if the Device was safe as she moved her legs. She thought about her current location in her head and feeling that her location had shifted, she stopped. None of her friends were around to tell her that *At a time like this, you should be using your Magical Phone’s Map* . Puk Puck was the only one left in these vast Ruins, she felt like crying under all the pressure, but she endured it.

She retrieved her Map from her bag, it was wide. The Magical Map told her where she was located with a shining light. It was completely different from the kind of area she thought she was in. Puk Puck followed the map, being careful not to make any mistakes, however, she had to run in a hurry. She encouraged herself to always stay with her many friends, she stopped her feet to fix the monitor that was in a bad angle. *That’s better* , she thought as she started running again.

If Puk Puck ran seriously, no one could outrun her, and she could catch up with anyone. She was the ultimate champion of Tag, so she was never able to participate in those games without a handicap, that was the Speed Queen, Puk Puck. Even though her feet was caught by piano wires or felt a shocks from stun guns, Puk Puck didn’t stop. She

continued to run, and run, and run. She reached the area where the Device had been installed.

“Hey everyone!”

The Magical Girls all looked at her at once. Their expressions all turned from tense to relieved, from relief, they changed to delight.

She heard screams of delight as they all flocked towards Puk Puck.

“Lady Puck!”

“Are you okay!?”

“We heard that the enemy was coming, so we prepared for you!”

“Alright! Alright!”

“Please look! We can activate the Device now!”

There was a loud shouting voice from Shadow Gale saying, “I signed the contract properly!” as Puk Puck stroked her head, Puk Puck looked up at the Device.

The Device looked huge. It shouldn’t be possible, but it was over 100 meters tall. It didn’t look like any beast could jump over it, it looked like a mysterious device that an alien or someone from the future would use. The unknown metal changed from black to red. At a glance, you wouldn’t recognize its thick armor whose power made her feel like it was stronger than any Magical Girl. Its poor impression at the time was all abandoned and thrown away, its whole body displayed a greatness that could change the world.

Puk Puck was at a loss for words, she spread out both her arms. One of the Magical Girls quickly approached her, “We spared some of these so that you could use it,” she said as she gave her a bag of Magical Gems. The Magical Girls cleared a path for Puk Puck. It was a path of glory. Her friends will rebuild the Land of Magic, everyone will honor and admire the name of Puk Puck, even those who were enemies yesterday, and those who would have been enemies tomorrow, everyone will become Puk Puck’s friends.

One step, two steps, she slowly approached it. Three steps, four steps, her heart was beating fast. This was the Device that transcended existence created by the First Mage, even Puk Puck was afraid. But nothing could be started if she just contained herself with fear. She had to use it with courage. Now, those watching over Puk Puck from a distance, they didn't know anything about the First Mage. They touched the Device without fear like Puk Puck or the Osk Faction, it was modified, made usable. Perhaps some of them weren't afraid because they were ignorant. However, she had to admit that it was due to that ignorance that the world was able to advance forward. Puk Puck won't lose to her friends. While her friends were thinking "We have no clue about this so we're not afraid", Puk Puck was thinking "I know all about this, so I'll overcome my fear".

Five steps, six steps, ten steps, twenty steps, Puk Puck gradually accelerated, she ran as fast as possible, her feet collapsed as she fell forward, her hand bracing herself. She heard a scream from behind, she looked at her feet, her socks had slipped, they were tangled together. It was the tear that Lethe had made, its torn part gradually separating, Puk Puck's feet entangled with it and caused her to fall.

She tried to get up with a smile, she was trying to reassure her friends, but Puk Puck wobbled, holding her hands, dropping her bag, the Magical Gems inside dropping and scattering. One of them rolled and hit the Device. It seems that it broke the Device's balance, as it became tilted.

Puk Puck looked up at the Device that was about to fall, and without panicking, tried to get up. But her right hand seemed to be stuck on the ground, buried deep within the floor. She tried to push the floor with her left hand, but now her left hand was also buried in the floor.

She tried to use her legs to pull out her arms, but something hit her head. A spanner from atop the device had slipped off. It fell directly on Puk Puck's head. Puk Puck understood. Someone was trying to kill her. Not only that, she couldn't avoid it. She looked up at the Device. The overwhelming presence of the device, it approached Puk Puck with

certainty. If someone used the Device that the First Mage had created as a blunt instrument, even the Three Sages would be shattered.

“No one come closer!”

She shouted at the Magical Girls who were about to run towards her. If she was going to die, at least she could save her friends. Puk Puck looked back at her friends again, and she smiled.

“Thank you. I love you all.”

That was neither a lie nor was it bravery. Puk Puck really did love everyone. It was because of that love that she’s always done her best. She saw Shadow Gale’s sad face as she tried to reach her arms out, Puk Puck simply smiled and waved.

She regretted that she would fall in the middle of battle, she wondered how it ended up like this, those were Puk Puck’s last thoughts.

☆ Pfle

Pfle had been hiding behind one of the monitors, quietly watching everything. When Puk Puck ordered them “No one come closer!” all the Magical Girls stopped in their feet. However, one of them, as if fighting with her own self will, was a Magical Girl who tried to rush towards Puk Puck. Pfle saw the girl in a black nurse outfit, she used her wheelchair to run towards her. She rotated behind her and held her arms down, and she never let go.

At the core of the ritual, was Shadow Gale chosen because of her powerful Magical Skill? Or was she chosen because of her qualifications? Whichever it was, even though it went well, it’d be trouble if everything was ruined just because she became collateral damage.

When Pfle had arrived in this room, she had been cornered. In terms of who could start the Device, only Shadow Gale’s job remained. If Puk Puck arrived, everything would be over. If the Osk Faction Magical Girls arrived, they would’ve done something to Shadow Gale, who was the only thing between activating the Device. If Pfle fought against the

Magical Girls here, there was no guarantee that she could win, and it was impossible for her to take Shadow Gale and escape with her. Meaning, all roads led to a dead end.

But she didn't despair. There was still one narrow road left. There was still something she could do. Pfle had read Premium Sachiko's contract, she took a gamble, if she failed, Shadow Gale would have miserably died.

Premium Sachiko's Magical Skill was that in exchange for a large amount of fortune, you would have to exhaust the rest of your life's luck, and invite unwanted misfortune towards you. However, that didn't always mean that it would result in death. Since those who signed the contract had death as their most undesirable misfortune, death came to them, only their most undesirable events would come. However, if there was misfortune beyond death, then death wouldn't come. If someone feared for someone else's life more than their own, then "That person's life" will be the one that death would come for. Because she was taken captive by Puk Puck's incredibly powerful Magical Skill, it was hard for Shadow Gale to think about anyone other than Puk Puck, she cared more about Puk Puck than she did about her own life.

This was Pfle's gamble, she read Premium Sachiko's contract thoroughly, and she placed speculation above speculation, before finally having no choice but to gamble.

And she had won. Afterwards, the scene had been set, the ending was coming closer. The Device had reached out to crush Puk Puck. She turned her eyes away from the Device moving as if in slow motion. Not because that beautiful girl that she saw was about to be crushed by the Device, but because if she saw Puk Puck, it would be trouble if she got attracted to her.

Shadow Gale strengthened her will to approach Puk Puck. Pfle wrapped her arms around her body, firmly pressing against Shadow Gale. Still, Shadow Gale tried to advance forward, and so she hugged her entire body. A terrible earthquake occurred from behind her. The winds blew up the dirt. The Magical Girls were screaming.

And then, Pfle felt a sharp pain in her chest. Liquid fell onto the floor. Pfle looked down at her chest. She had been stabbed with a scissor. Shadow Gale screwed it further inwards, Pfle spit out the air in her lungs.

Pfle hugged Shadow Gale even tighter. Still, Shadow Gale continued, putting more power into her scissors, and suddenly, she seemed to relax. She was no longer Shadow Gale. She had detransformed, she had become Mamori Totoyama, she had fallen unconscious.

Pfle looked forward. Across Mamori's head, her eyes met with the young Lazuline. She was looking at Pfle with a concerned expression. She had a rainbow colored candy in her hand.

"Heh, this looks bad, doesn't it? Looks like I was too late."

"It's fine... What's happened has happened. There's something I'd like to ask you."

"What is it?"

Blood spilled out from the edges of Pfle's mouth. Pfle forced out a smile.

"This girl... Mamori, I want you to take out all of her memories of me. She's not a strong person, you see."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure... Also, pass it over..... to Deluge... Please..... That's..... my request"

She saw Lazuline's hand stretching out to her, Pfle closed her eyes. Since the time she opened her eyes, she felt Mamori's body temperature and her heat, or so it seemed like. It wasn't her imagination. Pfle focused on both her arms, and she hugged Mamori's body tightly.

☆ Yoshioka

"This is horrible."

She didn't want to imagine what had gone on within the Ruins. It wasn't a nice place for a human to be in. Yoshioka sighed. Still, she watched her empty surroundings, filled with nothing but broken rocks and spears, uninteresting. Something was reflecting the sunlight, she approached it and thought, "Oh", she bent down and picked up a piece of candy shining in 7 colors from the rubble. Yoshioka watched it for several seconds. Eventually, she grew disinterested.

Since they only finished half their cleanup, she could at least finish it for them. Everything was over. The Magical Girls from the Ruins would probably thank the Caspar Faction somewhat. There wasn't much of the Caspar Faction in the first place, they never really deepened their research on either magic or Magical Girls, they didn't make any big leaps, they didn't do anything good, from a humanitarian and a Machiavellian point of view, they literally did *nothing*. They only had 1 vote as they sat cross-legged, holding a casting board while smiling at everyone. There was no way the other factions could respect them.

Yoshioka began gathering all of the garbage into one pile, excluding any heavy objects like rubble. As she turned around and picked them up one by one, she stopped her feet halfway.

"Oh my"

The rubble was shaking lightly. She used her toes to kick the rubble off, underneath, there was a Magical Phone. It wasn't just a normal Magical Phone, it was an administrator's Magical Phone. When Yoshioka turned it on, a stereoscopic image emerged.

"What do you think you're *doing*, Pon!"

The black and white sphere suddenly stood up. Even though this was the first time he's met Yoshioka, and he was unrelated to her, he was shouting and muttering at her and biting at her. While Yoshioka was a bit confused, inside, she had a crooked smile. Good things come to those who wait. Thanks to doing this unwanted job of trash collecting, she found this.

"My my, don't get too rustled up. I'll return you back to your Master."

“Oh, please, Pon. By the way, can I ask you something, Pon?”

“And what might that be?”

“Why are you in your human form, Pon? Isn’t it dangerous not to be in Magical Girl form, Pon?”

“Ah, it’s because of my faction, the Caspar Faction, you see. They have these *policies*. Well, even I think it’s dangerous, but you should know, as subordinates, we can’t go against our higher ups, can we...?”

“Well that’s too bad, Pon.”

“We’ve lived hard lives, haven’t we?”

She looked at the display of the phone. There was a text message. Its sender, *Marika Fukuroi*. Was that why this phone was ringing?

“Man, Pon. Snow White, she always does what she wants. Her vitals... she’s fine. She seems to be alive. She’s so unreasonable, I’d rather she not do anything without me by her side, Pon.”

“Well, I’m glad your Master’s all safe and sound... Well, I guess I’ll be turning this off then.”

Yoshioka turned off the main power supply. Because of this, there was no way for it to be turned on again without the Master’s authorization. She pulled out her Magical Phone from her pocket. Lapis Lazuline 3 hasn’t contacted her yet. Even if Snow White came out, it’ll take a bit more time. Yoshioka transformed into a Magical Girl, and she looked into her crystal ball.

Inside a blast furnace? The bottom of the ocean? Or maybe the lake of a volcano? Which would be better? After she thought for a while, she projected the image of a broad shouldered man, carefully trying to open a metal door’s valve. Frederica switched her viewpoint. If she moved outside the windows, she could see the blinking stars and the entire universe enveloped in darkness. It’s really useful to have the hair of scientists from the *International Space Station*, isn’t it? On a direction opposite to the Earth, Frederica pushed out the administrator’s Magical Phone. Its inertia would carry it anywhere. Watching the Magical Phone

floating in space, she nodded with satisfaction, and she cancelled her projection.

The Third Lazuline... She didn't even know if the First one would continue to be her ally forever. For now, she had to cooperate, but next time it won't be like this. Frederica was usually very hated, her enemies weren't few either.

Any distractions should be eliminated whenever possible.

Epilogue

In the corner of an unpopular café, two girls were silently talking to each other.

The Lazuline mentor/apprentice pair didn't choose this place to talk about their secrets. Both of them were Magical Girls that were gifted with high intuition and perception, often, this is usually the most important trait to have before someone is chosen as a Lazuline. Even amongst Magical Girls, who exceeded normal humans, they had an abnormally high level of sensory awareness and intuition, they'd be able to sense any eavesdroppers or listening devices immediately, they could talk whenever they wanted.

"Hey hey! Long time no see, Master. I got my memories back in that tent."

"Yes, it's been a while. How is Deluge?"

Lazuline paused for a single beat. She knew that her mentor was aware of that pause. But she didn't show any signs that she noticed, she played dumb and looked up at the ceiling.

"Y'know, that girl. She seems to be suffering from a *lot* of things."

"Yes, that's usually what happens to people her age."

"Kind of a terrible thing to say, considering you're the one causing it"

Lazuline's mentor placed both her elbows on the table, she placed her chin on top of her stacked hands. At such a careless behavior, Lazuline smiled and thought to herself, "*It really has been a while since we've met*".

"There's only one problem"

"Problem? There's a problem?"

"Yes, whether or not we can control her. It's a problem if she becomes a runaway."

"Ahh, I get it. Still, I want Deluge to do her best."

"Why?"

"...Mm, I dunno, wonder why?"

Because the Blue Bell inside of me told me to , she thought, but didn't speak it out loud. Lazuline hated being all sentimental and sad. It's much better to be fun and bright. Ah, well, since Blue Bell had said that, she couldn't be wrong, she thought.

Nothing good comes by following your sentiments , taught her mentor. What her mentor taught her was usually not wrong, yet still, there were those who did act according to their sentiments. She acted upon Pfle's request, she reported that she had stripped away Shadow Gale's memories, but she didn't report that she also spoke with Deluge. It was boring, it was stupid, but they were things that she'd rather keep to herself. Deluge was a *Princess* , but one day, she'll probably become a *Queen* . She would laugh at it, but there wouldn't be anything to gain.

Lazuline's mentor opened her mouth.

"If there's something you're not sure about, it's better to clarify it."

"Really, now?"

"That's right. I see your pained eyes."

What her mentor taught her wasn't usually wrong. It was probably caused by watching Pfle die. As she thought of the Wheelchair Magical Girl, embracing her partner as she was stabbed, she recalled their bitter feelings. Pfle's eyes. They were pained. Still, it was difficult for her to ask her mentor about it, she didn't want to ask her directly.

"Well, I'd like to watch and learn then, Master. If you'd please."

"You're young, get out there."

"If I do that, I'll probably be cut off, like Frederica, right?"

“Cutting ties with Frederica was something we had to do. If we continued to cooperate with her, it’ll damage our reputation. It’s a miracle that we’ve made it this far. If we’d continued on, we’d be called *Frederica’s Allies* .”

The two Magical Girls looked at each other, neither of them smiling.

“How’s Ripple?”

“Healthy”

Was she only saying that in a physical sense? Lazuline curled her lower lip, then she smiled, feeling sort of villainous.

What should she do? She was lost to the very end. She was worried. What that meant was that Mana had found herself in a half-assed position. Even though she kept yelling out that Magical Girls were stupid and foolish, even though she’d snapped at Uluru, this time, she felt like the stupid and foolish girl who didn’t know what to do. Even though she was in a rough position where she couldn’t get any results no matter how much she thought of it, she still couldn’t proceed, even if she stopped to think.

In front of the interrogation room, there were a row of Magical Girls awaiting their turn. Was it even possible for suspects to be queued up in a line like this? There was way too many of them, This situation was a lot better than recklessly saying “These people are harmless.”

This wasn’t a special place to send those who originally belonged to the Puck Faction and has deep loyalty to them, this was for those people who claimed that they’d been manipulated by Puk Puck’s Magical Skill, and they had to confirm if that was true.

Other than that, sometimes Card Soldiers would pass by. They willingly cooperated with the investigation, so the investigators listened to their story. Compared to the depressed former Puck Faction, they were bright and cheerful, happily laughing and talking with their fellow Card Soldiers.

When the Card Soldiers were queued up in front of the interrogation room, the former Puck Magical Girls would boo them. Each time they did, Mana would shout out “Quiet down!” Although they quieted down, they looked at Mana with grudging eyes.

Didn’t you guys say you were being manipulated by Puk Puk? You should be happy that these Cards are here, they’re helping you.

Still, it’s probably natural for them to look at the Card Soldiers grudgingly when they saw how happily they celebrated.

Resentment, grudges. This time, back during the B-City Incident, it was the same. There was probably something she could gain from this, but now Pfle isn’t here anymore. If she investigated her, it had to be from another direction. Mana wasn’t convinced. She knew she wouldn’t be satisfied if she was convinced, but she still wanted to be convinced anyway.

With Pfle gone, her only lead was Frederica. If she approached her, she had a hunch that she’ll find out the truth... or at least she was hoping that would be the case... She’ll have to support Snow White and Uluru as much as possible. No, she had to do more than she could.

She heard whining. She looked back, a Hearts Card was holding her shins and crying. The other Card Soldiers were all screaming “*She did it!*” while pointing their fingers. They pointed at a Former Puck Magical Girl, as she had a cheeky smile and whistled while looking at the ceiling.

“You people! I swear, you’re more trouble than you’re worth! Calm the hell down!”

She still couldn’t find Fal. The Ruins and Device recovery operation was being carried out rapidly, they gathered the things that weren’t originally from the Ruins, returning them to their owners, or they would discard them. She told them to tell her if they found her administrator Magical Phone, but she’s gotten no reply ever since. If he was able to contact her, he should’ve been back by now, but perhaps the power was turned off? Or was there something else that was wrong? She was worried about

Fal, she trusted him. Snow White knew of Fal's excellence and greatness. She also knew how robust an administrator's Magical Phone would be.

She also hasn't found Ripple. She had asked for cooperation with the Examination Division by telling them that she was a suspect against her will, telling them that she had been close to the important suspects in this case. However, Mana told her that there was no public stance on this, so they couldn't go searching for her.

Snow White also heard Ripple's heart. She knew that Ripple didn't intend to meet Snow White, but even if she did, she wouldn't give up. Whether Ripple liked it or not, Snow White would find her.

"Hey, are you stalling?"

"Stalling?"

"If you're not stalling, does that mean you can't keep up?"

"Don't talk as if Uluru has slow feet!"

Uluru was running behind her with a raging face. Snow White jumped over a rock, she kicked a tree trunk and crossed over a small valley. While she was reflecting on the folly of asking Uluru a direct question, she began to drift off, and dropped her speed.

Her substitute Administrator Magical Phone, a normal Magical Phone, had rang. It was a text from Mana. She told her that Dark Cutie had asked her on where Snow White was. Snow White replied "*Don't tell her*"

"What? Who was that?"

Snow White opened her mouth, then, she breathed out a sigh.

"No one."

"Ah, so you just don't wanna tell! You planning on throwing Uluru away!?"

Uluru was still fuming and complaining about this and that. Since Snow White had slowed down, she could afford to talk while running. Perhaps

it's better to not slow down after all, regretted Snow White.

Ripple should be targeting Frederica. Snow White would reach Frederica before Ripple could contact Frederica.

And then, she will *hunt*.

She never thought that she'd be proud of her alias, the *Magical Girl Hunter*, but if Frederica was involved, then she will become the *Magical Girl Hunter*.

"Hey, where are we going? This path feels weird"

Were her complaints always this loud and clear? Uluru was asking about their destination. *You should've asked that before we left*, thought Snow White silently.

"There's still some people who'd be willing to cooperate with us. We're headed there."

"Are they reliable?"

Uluru's words were easy to understand. Together with the voice of her heart, she could understand Uluru's intentions. Snow White shook her head lightly. She didn't think her own words were easy to understand. That's why, she didn't think she'll try to change herself anymore.

"I don't intend to rely on them"

"Exactly"

Snow White stopped. From between the trees, she could see the paved road. Finally, she's passed the mountainside. If she used the roads, she could go faster.

"We're going down to that road"

"Fine, fine. Hey, why don't you just use a *Gate*?"

"I'm taking a break from the Examination Division, so I can't use their stuff"

"That's kinda rough..... Hm?"

"What's wrong?"

"I could've sworn I just saw a blackish figure over there"

Snow White could hear the voice in her heart. Just now, she knew just which Magical Girl was hiding behind the scenes, but there was no need to confront her. Snow White didn't think of her herself as the protagonist, she didn't think of that girl as a villain either.

Snow White gave a bitter smile. It's as if she was thinking of someone like Pfle.

She headed towards the road descending from the mountain. Uluru also followed her from behind. She heard her Magical Phone ringing. If it was her Administrator Phone, the ringtone would've felt clearer.

A gave her life to protect B, but because A has died, B became a shell of her former self. Did that mean that A's death was meaningless? Every time Deluge looked at the soulless Shadow Gale, she thought. Was there no other better way?

Although her consciousness was fading, she didn't let it go. After being sliced up by Snow White, Blue Bell, and Dark Cutie, who had defeated the Shufflins and returned, had saved her, she remembered everything until she was carried outside the Ruins. When Deluge, whose life had somehow been saved, woke up on her bed, she held a map and keys. The map led to a facility that was managed by Pfle. The key fit the keyhole in the entrance. And inside, there was a variety of equipment, weapons, armor, chemicals. Mountains of documents and materials, and there was a girl sitting on a chair. Deluge knew who that girl was. When she kidnapped Shadow Gale, she saw her human form when she fainted. This girl was Shadow Gale before her transformation. She's lost a majority of her memories.

Now, she was holding a controller with empty eyes, fighting against Armor Arlie in a video game. Demon Wings were flying around them, but she didn't show any reaction to them. Even if she looked like she wasn't thinking about anything, her fingers kept moving. From the sidelines,

Deluge had no idea if she was having fun. Still, those two girls kept playing their game.

Deluge sat in a chair, putting her elbows on the table, and supporting her chin with her hands, she had nothing to do, but she kept watching those two play. This became a common sight within the facility.

Arlie, Brenda, Catherine, all of them were caring for Shadow Gale. Shadow Gale didn't know anyone except for Arlie, but she seems to be doing fine. Deluge took a look at the video monitors connected to the cameras outside of the facility. There were villas lined up endlessly without any people around. When the season comes, there'll probably be more people that'll show up. For now, it was difficult for Deluge to imagine it.

The things that Pfle had passed onto her were gently applying pressure to Deluge. Up until now, Deluge had been using Shadow Gale to control Pfle. With the things that Pfle had passed onto her, there were more things, and more people that she could control. Even as a mere Man-Made Magical Girl, it was easy for Deluge to imagine.

She took a cup from Catherine, putting it close to her mouth. The coffee that Catherine brewed was bitter. Still, she didn't feel like adding any sugar or milk. Brenda threw in 5 cubes of sugar. She had no idea what that would cause, won't it just make it too sweet?

Pfle was a selfish Magical Girl until the very end. She should've known that Deluge was suffering. On top of that, she passed on all of these worthless things casually. No, it only looked like she did it casually, but Pfle may not have been acting so casually. She probably knew that she was headed towards her last moments.

Perhaps, Pfle had a feeling that she was going to be killed. Deluge wondered if she was looking for someone to pass the torch to. No matter how many times she thought of it, she didn't know the right answers. Still, she thought of it over and over again.

What can she do? What does she want to do? A while ago, Deluge had no answer for that. Even now there wasn't any clear answer, but now her

choices and possibilities had increased. She had complex thoughts, that shouldn't be a bad thing.

She opened the notebook that she'd been playing with her fingertips. It was a student's notebook. Nami Aoki was the name written on it, there was also a picture attached. Deluge closed the page. She held her notebook between her index and middle fingers. Slowly, frost began falling down its surface, turning it white, when she held it tightly in her palm, it shattered into pieces.

Deluge took a cup of coffee, as she thought, it was bitter.